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Tuesday, 22 May 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Czaputowicz/Ms. Wronecka/Mr. Radomski	(Poland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djédjé
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Koishybayev
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Russian Federation	Mr. Kuzmin
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. Eckels-Currie

Agenda

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Letter dated 9 May 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Poland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2018/444)

Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2018/462)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Letter dated 9 May 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Poland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2018/444)

Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2018/462)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Hungary, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Latvia, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Maldives, Montenegro, Morocco, Myanmar, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, the Sudan, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Viet Nam and Yemen to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in the meeting: Mr. Yves Daccord, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Hanaa Edwar, Secretary-General of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite Her Excellency Ms. Joanne Adamson, Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, and Her Excellency Ms. Fatima Kyari Mohammed, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations.

I propose that the Council invite the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

I propose that the Council invite the observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/444, which contains the text of a letter dated 9 May 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Poland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept paper on the item under consideration.

I wish to also draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/462, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres.

The Secretary-General: I thank the Government of Poland for convening this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The most effective way to protect civilians is to prevent and end conflicts. That is why conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding are, and will remain, the highest priorities for the whole United Nations system. Conflict around the world is unleashing relentless horror and suffering upon millions of civilians — women, girls, men and boys. More than 128 million people around the world need immediate humanitarian aid, and that staggering figure is mainly driven by conflict. Last year, the United Nations recorded the death or injury of more than 26,000 civilians in just six countries affected by conflict: Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Somalia and Yemen. Ten thousand of them were in Afghanistan.

Civilians in conflict zones are also subjected to horrific violations of human rights, including rape and other sexual violence. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, the United Nations documented more than 800 cases of conflict-related sexual violence last year — a 56 per cent increase over 2016. The consequences of such attacks remain with survivors for the rest of their lives.

Conflicts continue to force millions of people to flee their homes for an uncertain future, often with limited access to basic help and protection. By the end of 2016, 65.6 million people had been uprooted by war, violence and persecution. Countless others go missing. The bombing and shelling of towns and cities kill or injure tens of thousands of civilians every year and lay waste to homes and vital infrastructure, including water and power systems. In Syria, for example, attacks involving air and ground-launched explosive weapons reportedly killed and injured significant numbers of civilians in Aleppo, Deir ez-Zor, Homs, Idlib, Raqqa and Rif Dimashq, destroying essential infrastructure, schools and hospitals.

Around the world, medical facilities are routinely attacked. Humanitarian and medical personnel are targeted or prevented from carrying out their duties. In 2017, the World Health Organization recorded 322 attacks resulting in 242 deaths among medical personnel and patients. That is unconscionable. In some cases, caring for the wounded and sick — the most basic acts of humanity — can lead to criminal proceedings against health workers. Medical supplies are looted or removed from convoys. Parties to conflict resort to threats or impose bureaucratic procedures that prevent people from accessing the health care they desperately need. Women, particularly those who are pregnant or need antenatal care, are often disproportionality affected.

Conflict is also an important driver of global food insecurity. Ten of the 13 major food crises in 2017 were driven by conflict. In Yemen, for example, nearly 3 million women and children are acutely malnourished, and more than 8 million people do not know where their next meal is coming from.

As bleak as the situation is, my report (S/2018/462) outlines some reasons for hope. There is growing recognition that respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law contributes to reducing conflict and countering terrorism. In General Assembly resolution 70/291, adopted in July 2016, Member States stressed that, when counter-terrorism efforts violate international humanitarian law and human rights law, they betray the values they seek to uphold and fuel violent extremism. I welcome that acknowledgement. Some parties to conflict and Member States have also taken steps to enhance respect for the law and improve the protection of civilians. Those steps include measures to reduce the harm resulting from the use of certain types of explosive weapons, mechanisms to track civilian harm in Somalia and the adoption of a national policy on preventing civilian casualties in Afghanistan. The United Nations strongly supports those efforts.

We also see Governments, civil society and others stepping up to advocate for change. Last November in Maputo, 19 African States adopted a communiqué on protecting civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. I was proud to join the campaign under the slogan Civilians are Not a Target, launched by the United Nations and partners on World Humanitarian Day last year. Such initiatives have the potential to translate into concrete change. To that end, my report recommends three actions.

First, all Governments should develop a national policy framework to protect civilians in conflict. Such a framework should set out proactive measures that mitigate and respond to civilian harm caused by national militaries, partner forces and international coalitions. They should make arms exports conditional on respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law, in line with the Arms Trade Treaty. And they should improve their ability to protect civilians in urban warfare, including finding alternatives to the use of explosive weapons.

Secondly, Member States should support the United Nations and others in engaging with non-State armed groups to develop policies, codes of conduct and action plans to protect civilians. Seventeen non-State armed groups have already signed action plans with the United Nations to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers. We need more of those initiatives.

Thirdly, Member States should support heightened advocacy on the protection of civilians and take concerted efforts to ensure accountability for serious violations, with a view to ending the climate of impunity. That should include credible national investigations into serious violations and full support for the work of the International Criminal Court.

I urge the Council and all Member States to give those practical measures serious consideration.

I also urge Council Members not to allow political differences to prevent or undermine action to protect civilians. That is vital not only to save lives and safeguard our common humanity; protecting civilians in conflict is also the only way to lay the foundation for sustained peace. Violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law in situations of armed conflict are correlated with protracted wars, with radicalization and violent extremism. Avoiding civilian casualties and providing unhindered access to humanitarian assistance speak to who we are as members of one human family. They are essential to avoid a cycle of instability and resentment, and make lasting peace and reconciliation possible. I urge the Council to do everything in its power to protect the millions of civilians caught up in conflict around the world.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Daccord.

Mr. Daccord: I am honoured to address the Security Council today on the topic at the heart of the mission and mandate of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and at the centre of all aspects of our daily work in armed conflicts around the world. My wish — and, I believe, our wish — is that, for once, we could discuss the protection of civilians in a positive, celebratory tone; that we could say the impressive progress on the normative and policy fronts has been matched finally by action on the ground. That is our wish. Sadly, we cannot. Once again, the gap between the two remains enormous, while the reality on the ground is characterized by a dire lack of protection. We all know what that reality looks like. It is the child left orphaned and permanently disabled after the family home was hit in an air strike. It is the doctor threatened by fighters for treating someone from the other side; the detainee languishing in an overcrowded jail with no procedural safeguards; the woman living in torment for decades without news of her missing husband; and it is the countless men, women and children suffering the long-lasting consequences of armed conflicts in every region of the world — each one with their own tragic story.

Our focus here today, as always, is how best to respond to such terrible suffering; how to prevent it from happening in the first place; and how to close the gap between words and action and actually protect civilians. Our basic message is simple and clear: the single most effective way to reduce suffering in war is to uphold the fundamental principle of humanity. The most important tool for achieving that is already in our hands. That tool is international humanitarian law, which is designed to respect and preserve life and dignity even in the worst circumstances. Equally clear is that the primary responsibility for respecting and ensuring international humanitarian law falls to States.

There can be no excuses and no exceptions to the applicability of the law — no matter how complex, protracted or fragmented an armed conflict may be and what labels or designations are given to the parties. We often see States and their partners claiming that they are fighting individuals designated as terrorists or foreign terrorist fighters, which sometimes includes children, rather than a conventional enemy and that international humanitarian law somehow does not apply or applies differently. There is also a general trend of denial of responsibility for international humanitarian law violations, including for direct or proxy partners and of passing responsibility to someone else down the line. That only increases the climate of impunity and ultimately causes yet more suffering.

Let us be clear. International humanitarian law protects everyone who is not, or is no longer, taking part in hostilities. Exceptional behaviour by one side — even including large-scale violations of international humanitarian law — cannot justify an unlawful response. On the contrary, States must not only respect international humanitarian law, but they must also influence those with whom they partner or whom they support to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law. In many of the ongoing armed conflicts that we see in the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere, belligerents receive significant support from States, for example, in the form of logistical support, training, financing and partnered operations. States that supply belligerents with weapons have a special responsibility and are particularly influential, as they are providing the means by which violations might be committed. The message must be clear: there will be no support without compliance with the law. A failure to follow the rules, which is essentially a failure in terms of humanity, results in much of the suffering that we see every day in our work. I would like to highlight four ongoing issues that we find of particular concern, with clear recommendations for improving the situation on the ground.

The first issue, which echoes the concerns of the Secretary-General, is the enormous impact on civilians from the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas. Working on the front lines of armed conflicts as we do, the ICRC sees close-up the often-devastating humanitarian consequences of such weapons — in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Libya and elsewhere. With conflicts becoming more urbanized and protracted, those consequences are becoming more widespread and are lasting longer, sometimes for generations. That is not only in terms of the traumatic loss of life, livelihoods, infrastructure and services, but also in terms of deep mental scars. The obvious solution lies in changing behaviour. In view of the unique vulnerabilities of civilians living in population centres, it is crucial that parties to armed conflicts reassess and adapt their choice of weapons in urban warfare. To that end, we once again urge States and parties to armed conflicts to avoid the use of explosive weapons that have wide-area effects in densely populated areas. That avoidance principle suggests a presumption of the non-use of such weapons owing to the high risk of their indiscriminate effects and of the consequent harm to civilians.

Damage and disruption to essential services brings me to the second main issue of concern, that is, the protection of health care. Resolution 2286 (2016) was a significant first step towards better implementation of existing international humanitarian law on medical care in armed conflict. However, during the two-year period since its adoption, from May 2016 to April 2018, the ICRC recorded more than 1,200 violent incidents targeting health care in 16 countries whereby health workers were killed, threatened or kidnapped; ambulances were obstructed; medical supplies were destroyed or prevented from crossing front lines; and hospitals were bombed or looted. The gap between words and actions is rather dramatic. It is imperative that all States — not only parties to conflicts — uphold international commitments and make the protection of health care a national priority.

One of the best ways to do so, we believe, is to focus on national and regional initiatives, including the exchange of best practices between States. More specifically, we urge all States to take the following five priority measures. First, they should review their military doctrines, procedures, planning and practices to protect medical care in the conduct of military operations; secondly, ensure that their domestic legislation enables health-care professionals to carry out their work impartially and safely under international humanitarian law and medical ethics; thirdly, ensure conflict-specific training and support for health care professionals, and capacity-building and preparedness of health-care systems; fourthly, gather good quality data to develop better tools to prevent violence from happening and to mitigate its consequences when it does; and, fifthly, support behavioural change initiatives and other means of awareness-raising aimed at increasing respect for health-care workers, in general, so that they can work in safety even under the most difficult circumstances.

The third issue of particular concern that I would like to highlight today concerns the deprivation of liberty. The ICRC visits hundreds of places of detention in conflict zones around the world every year. In many of them, the use of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment are the norm, with dramatic consequences for detainees' physical and mental health. Severe overcrowding is also common. That is often due to a high incarceration rate, shortcomings in the judicial process and limited infrastructure. All too often, places of detention are inhumane and unmanageable. In the long-term, that has very negative repercussions on society as a whole, while fuelling cycles of conflict and abuse. How can that be remedied? States have an obligation to respect human dignity at all times, including in temporary places of detention. Prison infrastructure needs to be planned in line with the Nelson Mandela Rules. Detention staff should have the training, capacity and independent oversight to manage places of detention humanely and adequately. Judicial guarantees and procedural safeguards must be enforced rapidly following capture or arrest under the relevant law. ICRC visits to places of detention in conflict zones can play a critical role in ensuring that detainees are treated humanely. We therefore call on States and other parties to armed conflicts to grant the ICRC access to places of detention.

The fourth and last issue concerns the many people who go missing in armed conflict. No one can even be sure how many people are affected, In Iraq, for example, estimates on the number of missing persons from past and current conflicts range from 250,000 to 1 million. The plight of those people, and of their families, can go on for many years, even decades. People have the right to know what happened to their missing relatives. International humanitarian law includes a range of provisions to prevent people from going missing in armed conflict and to account for those who do. Parties to conflict have an obligation to provide information and make efforts to put families back together, no matter who they are or where they come from. The way in which cases of missing persons are handled can have a long-term impact on reconciliation, stability and peace, for better or worse. We can help. We can support parties to conflict to fulfil their obligations, which will, in turn, help people to rebuild their lives. This year, we are launching a four-year project with a global community of practitioners to develop professional standards and practices to improve the response to missing persons and their families.

Despite that very gloomy picture, it would be wrong — and indeed dangerous — to believe that international humanitarian law is always violated and therefore is useless. Any normalization of violations could have a terrible impact on those affected by armed conflict. Conversely, we believe that a more positive focus on international humanitarian law can actually strengthen compliance.

While we are rightly concerned by violations of the law, we must equally recognize the many positive examples of respect for it. Those, of course, rarely make the headlines. To that end, the ICRC is currently undertaking a project on international humanitarian law in action to collect and promote evidence-based examples of respect for the law from parties to conflict around the world. That, we hope, will reaffirm and strengthen the positive impact of international humanitarian law in today's armed conflicts.

In conclusion, there is clearly still a long way to go before the various normative and policy achievements regarding the protection of civilians are felt where they really matter — not on paper, but on the ground. The ICRC therefore urges States to take decisive action in the four particular areas that I highlighted, namely, to avoid the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas, counter a wide range of threats to health care, ensure humane treatment and conditions of detention for all detainees and commit to preventing people from going missing and properly accounting for those who do. Those are the responsibility of not just States themselves, but their partners and proxies too.

We stand ready to guide and support States and other stakeholders to take practical measures to achieve those goals. Action in those four areas would go a long way towards ensuring better protection of civilians in armed conflicts everywhere, and it would do much to restore faith in our common humanity.

The President: I thank Mr. Daccord for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Edwar.

Ms. Edwar: I would like to thank Poland, in its capacity as President of the Security Council, for inviting me to participate in this debate.

I have been working for 50 years as a women's and human rights defender across Iraq. For most of that time, I have been working to protect civilians living in conflict and instability, by helping them recover in the aftermath of violence and supporting the next generation of Iraqis to do the same. I co-founded the Iraqi Women's Network in 2004 and the Iraqi Al-Amal Association in 1992, which focuses on the rehabilitation of people rather than bricks and mortar.

I come to the Council from a country filled with horror that has suffered for more than three decades from the scourge of war and siege. Over the past 15 years, civilians have been plagued by armed conflict, insecurity and violence. Our people have sacrificed a lot. We endured crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. We suffered through the mass executions of tens of thousands of people, ethnic and religious cleansing of civilians, in particular the Yazidis, and sexual violence and sexual slavery of women and girls. Ten million of us have been displaced from our homes. Essential services, like water and electricity, are gone. Our hospitals, health centres, schools and social welfare institutions in Nineveh, Al-Anbar, Salahadin and Diyala have been destroyed.

The operations to liberate Mosul were extremely fierce and costly. I was in daily contact with families and human rights defenders in the city who were hiding in basements. The fighting took place in densely populated areas, involving explosive weapons with wide-area effects. The bombardment waw constant, destroying hundreds of thousands of homes. People hiding had nothing to eat, resorting to eating the dirt around them. Women were forced to give birth alone and without any medical treatment. Injured people could not easily access hospitals; many died because they could not reach treatment in time. The departure of civilians from those areas during the operation was extremely risky. Mosul was reduced to rubble and turned into an open cemetery. There are no data or statistics on the numbers of the dead. We are now hearing accounts of bodies appearing in the river around Mosul.

During those dangerous and tragic conditions, voluntary youth civil society initiatives emerged. Young people sought to collect medical assistance and medicine and to cooperate with military forces to deliver them to civilians. A team came forward to collect the bodies from Mosul and save the city from the spread of epidemic. I know of one nurse, Serour, whose sister was killed by Da'esh. She turned her grief and anger into spearheading that effort. In an old house, her team found a room containing 150 stacked bodies — men, women and children killed by shots to the head. The team has recovered 1,350 bodies, including the bodies of Da'esh fighters. The mission is dangerous. The bodies may be near unexploded bombs, and the smell of the bodies is unbearable. They collect the bodies and then transfer them to a cemetery without passing through forensics, which would facilitate the identification of the dead and missing. To date, there are still 3,000 reports of missing civilians in the old city.

All of those efforts require the support of the Council. We must identify the missing, recover the bodies and return them to their families. The missing Yazidi women and children must be liberated and allowed to return home. They, and many of the people who have suffered, have deep psychological trauma from their experiences. They need more help, which requires particular capacity-building in Iraq to improve local services, led by local organizations and local people.

Civilians who have suffered must have access to justice and accountability. The resolutions in 2017 on Da'esh accountability and the joint communiqué committing to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence, signed in September 2016, are crucial documents. We welcome them, and I urge the Council to support their implementation. But there must be accountability for all the harm committed in Iraq by all parties to the conflict. Accountability should not be limited to some people and some types of violations. All civilians deserve redress for their suffering. That must be clearly linked to the reconciliation efforts.

The families of many Da'esh fighters have been badly treated and isolated in camps. Many of the children do not have any legal documents. Women's organizations deal with many cases of women who were forced to marry fighters and are now widows with children, but lack marriage and birth certificates. Many are threatened with death on the basis of honour. Many are at risk of suicide. Those women and children bear a huge stigma that must be addressed. They must receive rehabilitation and reconciliation assistance.

National authorities, United Nations agencies and the international community must work with local actors to demand, determine and agree on an appropriate minimum package of support and assistance for communities. Humanitarian action, as well as longer-term assistance, must be conflict- and gender-sensitive in order to facilitate social cohesion and actively reduce conflict. It must address the long-standing structural drivers of conflict, which remain a problem for communities after return. All populations, civil society, women, youth and ethnic and religious minorities must be involved. It must also include communities affected by extremism. We must build community capacity for the protection of civilians, the early warning of conflict and address the legacy of violent extremism. It is essential to protect civilians from harm by avoiding it in the first place.

In conclusion, I come to the Council at a crucial time for the issue of the protection of civilians in Iraq. Successful elections following the liberation of areas under the control of Da'esh offer us a chance to move forward to build inclusive peace and justice. In that effort, the increase in all women fully participating should be respected. We must continue to focus on people, not bricks and mortar.

As we look towards the future, I remain concerned about many other civilians, in particular in my region. Many live in great hardship because of the many ongoing wars. They live without protection in places such as Syria, Yemen, Libya and Gaza. I stand in solidarity with them and with civilians across the world who are suffering. I urge the Council to do all it can to ensure that civilians are protected in line with legal obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law and as fellow human beings.

The President: I thank Ms. Edwar for her briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland.

I would like to begin by thanking Secretary-General António Guterres, Mr. Yves Daccord and Ms. Hanaa Edwar for their comprehensive briefings. I would also like to underline the importance of the messages they conveyed to the Security Council today. They show that violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law continue to have an enormous, negative impact on civilians.

Poland welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2018/462) covering the year 2017, in particular its well-founded and accurate recommendations aimed at solving the global protection crisis. It reveals a particularly appalling image of suffering and pain affecting millions of women, children and men who have been the victims of deliberate and indiscriminate attacks by parties to conflicts all over the world. The report also underscores that as of 2017 more than 50 million people have been affected by conflict in urban areas. Those who are particularly vulnerable in conflict situations are women, children, persons with disabilities and detainees.

Civilian objects, such as schools, hospitals, markets and places of worship, are often the targets of attacks. The number of persons missing in armed conflicts is equally of concern, as it is constantly increasing. While the responsibility to prevent disappearances and provide answers to relatives lies with the State authorities, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross and other aid organizations, we should all take part in explaining their circumstances.

I would like to focus now on three main areas in which we should act together to ensure effective protection in conflict situations: prevention, protection and accountability.

We should spare no effort to make conflict prevention an overarching priority of the United Nations. As the Secretary-General quite rightly stated in his report, dialogue and inclusive peace processes combined with a holistic approach to address the root causes of conflicts are essential elements of preventive action.

If an armed conflict breaks out, our focus must be directed at the highest standard of protection provided to civilians. That responsibility lies primarily with parties to the conflict, both State and non-State actors, but also with the international community as a whole. It is of the utmost importance to develop and promote good practices by parties to the conflict that would prevent and mitigate harm to civilians.

We should also pay special attention to humanitarian challenges to the protection of civilians, such as the inhumane impact of improvised explosive devices and the illicit flows of small arms and weapons. Both have the same degrading, socioeconomic impact on affected communities. The United Nations has the proper reach and effective means to deal with such issues. In that context, the existing disarmament machinery within the United Nations should be used effectively. In particular, I would like to stress the importance of the implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, as well as the Chemical Weapons Convention. Another important instrument is the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects and its Protocols, which addresses the various inhumane effects of existing and emerging weapons systems.

In recent years numerous countries around the world have been severely affected by armed conflicts, including Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, the Niger, Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia, Syria and Yemen. With regard to European countries, Ukraine has been witnessing continuous military aggression and the unlawful occupation of its territories. Despite many efforts undertaken by the international community, a ceasefire in Ukraine is far from being achieved. The number of casualties is particularly alarming. According to recent reports by the United Nations, 2,830 civilians died and 25, 000 were wounded as a result of that protracted armed conflict. There are also 1.5 million internally displaced persons in Ukraine.

Every month more than 1 million people are forced to cross the front lines to receive humanitarian aid and basic services. Such cases clearly show that civilians are the ones who often pay the highest price in conflict situations. Poland believes that respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law must be enhanced. It is important that all State and non-State parties to conflicts comply with their legal obligations.

Moreover, it is crucial to implement good practices in this field. An example of which is Poland's interministerial commission on international humanitarian law, which several other countries have also done, in order to ensure that international humanitarian law is implemented throughout the whole judicial system. Tasked with the dissemination of the norms of international humanitarian law, the commission meets twice per year and is made up of representatives from the relevant ministries. It conducts reviews and analyses of international agreements related to international humanitarian law and formulates opinions on the legislative, organizational and educational measures that should be undertaken to ensure the full incorporation of international humanitarian law into the Polish legal system. It also drafts national reports on the application and dissemination of international humanitarian law in Poland.

Impunity for any violation of international humanitarian law should be brought to an end, or at least substantially reduced. It is necessary to ensure accountability no matter who the perpetrator of a given crime or abuse is. The International Criminal Court should play a leading role in holding parties to conflict accountable and in restoring a sense of justice on the international stage. The Security Council should refer flagrant violations of fundamental international law standards to the International Criminal Court with greater frequency. We also support initiatives aimed at limiting the use of the veto by the Council in cases related to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, which is one of the most horrific war atrocities that can be committed against civilians. .

This year marks the seventieth anniversary of the adoption by the United Nations of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Sadly, despite the adoption of the Convention, human beings have not stopped committing the crime of genocide. One of the most dramatic cases we have seen of this crime is the genocide that took place against the Tutsis in Rwanda, where close to 1 million people were killed in 1994.

Poland has supported and welcomes with satisfaction the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide. We encourage States that have not yet expressed their support for the code of conduct, especially those that are members of the Security Council, to consider doing so. I also encourage the 116 States that supported the code of conduct to enhance their commitment to the Security Council's actions against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Since the adoption of the landmark resolution 2286 (2016), in 2016, which is dedicated entirely to the protection of medical-care providers in armed conflict, at least once a week some medical-assistance personnel have experienced some sort of hostility in the field. It is the duty and responsibility of the international community to take practical measures to prevent that from happening. At the forefront of medical-assistance efforts is the International Committee of the Red Cross, which delivers aid to victims of conflict. In that context, I would refer to the valuable Health Care in Danger initiative, which aims to address the issue of medical personnel being targeted and to protect those who provide aid.

We have endorsed the Kigali Principles enunciated in 2015, which set out critical benchmarks for Member States and address the most relevant aspects of peacekeeping, including pre- and post-deployment training on the protection of civilians. We strongly encourage strict implementation of the zero-tolerance policy with regard to sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeeping personnel. The Blue Helmets should make us proud of their activities instead of making us feel ashamed.

Next year marks the twentieth anniversary of the issue of the protection of civilians first being placed on the Security Council's agenda. It is worthwhile noticing that some progress on the protection of civilians has been made. In that context, it is important to commend the initiatives of the World Health Organization to develop a surveillance system for attacks on health care, as well as the efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross aimed at adopting laws on protecting health care.

Despite many achievements in the field, much more needs to be done globally. The Secretary-General's words pronounced a year ago in this Chamber on the occasion of the annual debate on the protection of civilians remain valid today: "What is needed now is action that will turn ... words into reality" (*S/PV.7951, p. 3*). It is hard not to agree. I look forward to the discussion to come.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Koishybayev (Kazakhstan): I thank the presidency of Poland and the Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Mr. Jacek Czaputowicz, for putting the spotlight on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and the Secretary-General for his insightful recommendations. We also express warm appreciation to the Director-General of the International

Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Mr. Yves Daccord, and the civil society representative from Iraq, Ms. Hanaa Edwar, for their comprehensive briefings.

Statistics show that about 75 per cent of all war victims are civilians. The impact of conflict on civilians is particularly severe due to the hostilities in urban areas, excessive use of explosive weapons and increased use of improvised explosive devices by non-State armed groups. Such fatalities and gross violations of international humanitarian and human rights law are accompanied by large-scale forced displacements that have led to a global protection crisis.

My delegation supports the recommendations on the three protection priorities set forth in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2018/462) and would like to make the following observations for consideration by the Security Council.

First, ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law and enhancing accountability are critical for strengthening the protection of civilians. All serious violations of international humanitarian law must be investigated, and perpetrators must be brought to justice, in order to end all forms of impunity. The United Nations, the Council and the global community should actively advocate enhancing respect for international humanitarian law, including on provision of impartial medical care and unimpeded access to humanitarian aid. Improved data collection also needs to be promoted.

Secondly, the survival of injured victims depends upon operational medical facilities and medical personnel. Kazakhstan co-sponsored resolution 2286 (2016), the unanimous adoption of which reflected the Council's unity in committing to the protection of humankind in war. However, health-care personnel and facilities remain under fire in a number of conflicts, and the effective implementation of resolution 2286 (2016) becomes even more necessary. In that regard, in October 2017, we signed the French-led declaration on the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel in conflict.

Thirdly, United Nations peace operations should give priority to the protection of civilians. A whole-of-system approach, close cooperation among all components, operational clarity on the formulation and implementation of mandates and forging relationships with local populations are all important. Our delegation also believes that, in order for them to be sustained, mandates to protect civilians must be linked to a comprehensive political strategy. We therefore underscore the importance of implementing the relevant recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations. Peacekeeping operations also need to implement the recommendations of the Santos Cruz report aimed at changing how the United Nations works in high-risk peacekeeping operations. We must also actively use non-military protection tools, including unarmed civilian protection.

Fourthly, the protection of civilians is primarily the responsibility of the host country. Member States therefore need to develop national compliance frameworks, which should include capacity-building, strengthening the rule of law, comprehensive security sector reforms and good governance, as well as the adoption of legislation that conditions the export of arms. Kazakhstan acceded to the Arms Trade Treaty in December 2017, and calls on others to do the same. We also call on the United Nations system, regional organizations, the international community and donors to provide the necessary technical and financial support to Member States.

Women, children, internally displaced persons and persons with disabilities continue to be disproportionately affected by armed conflict and need our special attention. All humanitarian responses therefore must address the needs of vulnerable groups, including access to essential medical care. Victims of landmines and other munitions and the indirect effects of armed conflict, such as disease, malnutrition and famine, also need special medical care and specialized services.

Fifthly, as the Secretary-General underscored, the international community should focus on preventive measures, including tackling the root causes of conflict, peacebuilding and economic development. My country is committed to enhancing regional stability, using a three-pronged strategy to resolve regional conflicts through the security-development nexus, a regional approach and the United Nations Delivering as One initiative. In our region, we are focusing on Afghanistan, where more than 10,000 civilians lost their lives or suffered injuries during 2017. We provide humanitarian aid, development and technical assistance to Afghanistan, with special attention to women, youth and children. We are implementing a scholarship programme for Afghan students. We also contribute to reintegration programmes for children and actively advocate for the gender equality and economic independence of Afghan women. With that in mind, this year Kazakhstan will convene the high-level international conference on the theme "Empowering women in Afghanistan", aimed at strengthening the status of Afghan women.

To conclude, Kazakhstan pays tribute to the noble work of the ICRC and other humanitarian and human rights organizations. We believe that all the challenges I mentioned can be effectively addressed only by bringing together Member States, international, regional and local stakeholders and humanitarian and civil society organizations and by building trust among them.

My delegation gives the utmost importance to the security of civilians and is fully committed to implementing the provisions of the relevant norms of international law.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate. I also thank the Secretary-General, Director-General Daccord and Ms. Edwar for briefing the Security Council today. I would like to thank Ms. Edwar in particular for reminding us of the human suffering and the human tragedy of war. I salute her determination to focus on people, not on stones.

The core mandate of the Security Council is to maintain international peace and security. As recognized by the Council, large-scale human suffering can fuel conflict and threaten security. Aside from the clear moral reasons for doing so, the fact that the Council should act to protect civilian populations affected by conflict is therefore within its core mandate.

However, despite our many efforts, attacks on innocent civilians and civilian infrastructure continue to take place. The Secretary-General raised the issue of the bombings in Syria. The harrowing images from eastern Ghouta of homes bombed to rubble and of innocent civilians, many of whom are children, killed indiscriminately by the Syrian regime and its backers should shock and appal all of us. Attacks on civilians and the preventing of humanitarian and medical supplies from reaching them have been a weapon used by the regime.

In Ukraine, despite repeated calls by the European Union and others to immediately stop ceasefire violations near critical civilian infrastructure, notably the Donetsk water filtration station, the indiscriminate shelling continues. The Education Cluster, co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children, reported that the parties to the conflict damaged 42 schools in Ukraine in 2017, representing an increase from 26 schools during the previous year. Those attacks damaged the very foundations of the systems that are essential to sustain some of the most vulnerable societies throughout periods of conflict and reconstruction.

Sadly, around the world, health-care workers are threatened and killed. Their facilities are looted and destroyed, affecting the access of communities to health care for years to come. Schools also face attacks and the teachers, boys and girls within them are the target of recruitment, sexual violence and other abuses. Those who dedicate their lives to providing essential aid to civilians affected by conflict are also targeted. In South Sudan, more than 100 humanitarian workers have been killed since the conflict began five years ago.

As the members of the Security Council and the international community, we must do more to protect civilians who are affected by conflict. The intentional targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure is a war crime. International humanitarian law is our framework. As Mr. Yves Daccord said, it is our fundamental principle of humanity. We must ensure that it is enforced and that perpetrators of crimes against such law are held to account.

Allow me to highlight three areas where the protection of civilians could be improved through the application and enforcement of international humanitarian law.

First, concrete steps must be taken to integrate the protections provided by international humanitarian law into national policies and programmes. We urge States to engage constructively in the intergovernmental initiative on strengthening respect for international humanitarian law, which can help States to share best practices and to overcome challenges to the practical implementation of international humanitarian law. The United Kingdom recently endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration. In line with that and with international humanitarian law, we will continue to take all feasible measures to ensure the protection of schools, teachers and students, including particularly girls, whose access to education is disproportionately affected by attacks. We urge others to likewise endorse the declaration and to take such action. In order to strengthen national compliance with international humanitarian law by the United Kingdom, we ensure that all our military personnel receive robust training throughout their careers. We are proud to share our expertise with other countries to strengthen compliance, including by developing more effective military justice systems.

Secondly, the effective monitoring and reporting of compliance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law in situations of conflict is critical to raising awareness of protection issues and can provide the necessary evidence base for timely political and legal action.

The United Kingdom strongly supports technological advancements for the monitoring and reporting of violations, including the World Health Organization's real-time surveillance system of attacks on health care. We also support effective international criminal-justice systems, which have an important role to play in bringing the perpetrators of atrocities to justice when States are either unable or unwilling to do so. As the Secretary-General said, we must end the climate of impunity.

Thirdly, United Nations peacekeeping missions play a vital role in protecting civilians in some of the most fragile regions in the world, where the application of international humanitarian law is critical. We welcome efforts to support the strengthening of human rights components in United Nations peacekeeping operations, as well as the deployment of United Nations civilian human rights monitors to countries affected by conflict. Worryingly, we see at times the General Assembly seeking to weaken mandates agreed by the Council and the Fifth Committee by defunding human rights posts. This must stop.

We welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General to mobilize all partners and stakeholders in support of more effective United Nations peacekeeping through his Action for Peacekeeping initiative. Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of peacekeeping missions, including through better long-term planning, the right troops and equipment, the increased participation of women and a clear framework for monitoring and evaluating performance within missions, will further improve their ability to protect civilians.

Today millions of innocent civilians are suffering, owing to appalling violations of international humanitarian law. This leads to enormous suffering and destroys the social fabric of communities, which in turn threatens peace and security. We must ensure that such violations are not ignored, that perpetrators are held to account and that we make it ever more difficult in future for would-be violators to get away with such actions unseen.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): I should like to start by joining others in commending Poland for having convened this open debate, and we are glad, Mr. Minister, to see you preside over this meeting. Let me also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing on the theme based on his comprehensive report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2018/462). I should also like to thank the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Yves Daccord, and Ms. Hanaa Edwar for having shared their perspectives with the Council.

Across the many conflict and crisis situations that we deal with here in the Council, the protection of civilians is a common challenge. Innocent civilians suffer vicious attacks; many others become displaced; some are kidnapped or are held under siege; and others are starved or denied the basic necessities. Even the lives of humanitarian workers and other actors, who are the front lines of saving lives, continue to be at risk. We have witnessed all this in a number of conflict and crisis situations.

Therefore, the protection challenges identified in the report of the Secretary-General, particularly those related to attacks against civilians and civilian objects, as well as instances of disregard for international humanitarian law by parties to an armed conflict, are indeed a matter of serious concern. We note the three additional actions recommended by the Secretary-General and the national protection policy framework annexed to his report. We hope that these three additional actions, as well as the policy framework, will be further discussed within the appropriate framework.

As identified in the 2016 report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/447), enhancing respect for international humanitarian and human rights law and promoting good practice by parties to armed conflict should continue to be the priority for action in the protection of civilians. Strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law by both States and non-State armed groups is important in this regard. Peacekeeping operations continue to be an important tool for the protection of civilians, in spite of the challenges they face, especially in asymmetric environments.

As a major troop-contributing country to United Nations peace operations and one of the signatories to the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, Ethiopia attaches great importance to the protection of civilians. In this context, we believe that proper consultation with troop- and police-contributing countries in the formulation of the mandate of a mission is vital in order to achieve greater effectiveness in the execution of the mandate and ensure the protection of civilians.

Moreover, peace operations should be adequately resourced and equipped with the necessary capabilities if they are fully to implement their protection-of-civilians mandates. Without bridging this gap, it would be too difficult to expect peace operations to deliver on their mandates, and we have a long way to go in addressing this critical challenge.

Of course, it goes without saying that peacekeepers should be guided by the broader principles of international humanitarian law in carrying out their mandated responsibilities and that they should be adequately trained in the area of international humanitarian law and human rights law.

As one of the largest refugee-hosting countries, we continue to grapple with increasingly complex challenges related to the suffering of people on the move as a result of armed conflicts. In this regard, it is important to reinforce our international values, solidarity and responsibility-sharing as the basis upon which we, as the international community, must move forward in responding predictably, comprehensively, efficiently and meaningfully to these challenges.

I would like to conclude my remarks by reaffirming the commitment of Ethiopia to the protection of civilians, including by providing life-saving humanitarian assistance and international protection to the thousands of refugees we continue to host as well as in our continued participation in various peace operations in our region.

Ms. Eckels-Currie (United States of America): Mr. President, allow me to welcome you to the Council.

I wish to thank Secretary-General Guterres for his comments this morning, and I also want to thank Mr. Daccord for his briefing today. It is good to see him again after many years. I believe that the last time I saw him was when I was still working for the International Committee of the Red Cross, which seems like a lifetime ago. It is, unfortunately, under circumstances that are not so positive, as he is here giving us a stark reminder of the horrific situation that far too many innocent civilians now endure in conflicts across the globe. We are strongly encouraged by the presence here today of Ms. Hanaa Edwar and her testimony before the Council. Briefings such as hers give us a real sense of the reality on the ground, and we encourage the Council to continue this important practice.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2018/462) paints a dismal picture of the protection of civilians in the field and in its paragraph 5 describes a

> "state of unrelenting horror and suffering affecting millions of women, children and men across all conflicts".

The state of affairs with respect to the protection of civilians is bleak, and millions of people are bearing the consequences. Tens of thousands of innocent people are dying from unlawful attacks involving explosive weapons and chemical weapons, deliberate attacks on schools and medical facilities, extrajudicial killings, starvation, sexual violence and blatant disregard for international humanitarian law. Millions more are either missing or have been forced from their homes, and medical and humanitarian personnel are being targeted at an alarming rate. Sexual violence increasingly is being used as a tactic of war, and victims continue to be targeted based on their ethnic and religious backgrounds. Member States seemingly feel no qualms about routinely denying humanitarian access to civilians in dire need, from Burma to Yemen.

We all have an obligation and moral duty to demand and uphold the international community's resounding rejection of the use of chemical weapons in war 100 years ago, after the First World War demonstrated the horrors of these weapons. We all have an obligation to uphold Security Council resolutions that call for the protection of schools, medical facilities and even journalists from being targets in war. We have an obligation to insist on unhindered humanitarian access for all those in need and on safe, voluntary evacuations of civilians compelled to flee their homes, consistent with our obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law. It is critical that all States Members of the United Nations do their part to protect civilians.

The United States welcomes the Secretary-General's steps to improve peacekeeping and revive a sense of collective responsibility for the success of

United Nations peacekeeping operations. But we need to be honest and clear when Member States are not living up to their commitments, and we — especially we in the Council — should be willing to apply meaningful pressure when parties to a conflict do not change course.

In missions across the globe, peacekeepers today serve at great personal risk and act heroically, in many cases, to protect civilians. However, we also still have far too many examples of peacekeepers failing to take necessary action to protect civilians. We continue to see units retreat from towns they are supposed to protect rather than standing their ground as armed attackers approach. We continue to see those who are responsible for protecting civilians abuse their positions of trust.

Improving the protection of civilians in peacekeeping requires increased accountability, and the United States welcomes the Secretary-General's steps to institutionalize a culture of accountability for performance in United Nations peacekeeping, starting with the development and implementation of a comprehensive performance policy that identifies transparent standards for performance and details measures to hold underperformers accountable. The United States stands firmly behind the commitment to enhancing performance for the protection of civilians and encourages all Member States to do the same by supporting the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, which were designed to help peacekeepers effectively implement their protection-of-civilian mandates.

For example, the Principles call for troop-contributing countries to empower military commanders of peacekeeping contingents to use force to protect civilians, knowing that if commanders have to wait hours and hours for guidance from their capitals, it may be too late to prevent a fast-approaching attack on a nearby village. If properly implemented, there is little doubt that the Kigali Principles would make peacekeeping missions more effective, improve civilian security and save lives.

We also join our United Kingdom colleagues in support of the human rights elements of peacekeeping missions. Their work fulfils crucial protection and prevention aspects of Council mandates, to which all Council members, but especially the five permanent members, have agreed.

But what else can we, as the Security Council or as Member States, do to promote respect for international human rights law? For one, we as the Security Council should stand in solidarity against genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing, and work together to adopt urgently needed resolutions in all such cases.

Secondly, we as the Council should use the entire range of tools at our disposal that can and should be employed to compel parties to comply with applicable international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and to promote accountability for breaches or violations. That includes sanctions, arms embargoes, fact-finding missions, independent mechanisms to gather, collect and store evidence, and justice mechanisms to bring to justice those responsible for those violations.

Thirdly, each State should ensure that they have appropriate legislative and institutional arrangements to address current and prevent future violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of fundamental human rights. Accountability is essential to provide both justice for victims of such violations and to end the culture of impunity that leads to them in the first place. Individual States should also investigate and, where appropriate, prosecute crimes committed within their jurisdiction. Credible national accountability efforts should be encouraged and supported along with other mechanisms, including fact-finding missions, commissions of inquiry and international and hybrid tribunals. Those mechanisms are critical when national options are unavailable or futile.

Fourthly, we should use all the prevention tools we have at our disposal to stop cycles of conflict, build social cohesion and promote and protect human rights. We note the Secretary-General's important leadership on the prevention and peacebuilding agendas.

Finally, the international community must give this issue the attention it deserves. Today is an important step in that regard. We all know it is not enough to merely be outraged by the accounts we have heard here today — and pretty much every other week that we sit in the Council. It is not enough to say the right things in the Chamber and then walk out of here and do nothing. We must remain committed to promoting the protection of civilians by doing our own part as well. We have to use the tools that we have to ensure that we are doing our part to protect civilian lives and fulfil our own conventional and customary obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. That is not something that any of us can do alone, but that should not stop all of us from taking the robust national and regional steps we can. We will need solid commitments and urgent action by all to truly and effectively protect innocent human lives.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation welcomes you, Mr. President, and thanks the leadership of the Republic of Poland for having organized and convened this meeting on such a critical theme. We also thank the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for his briefing, as well as the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Yves Daccord, and Ms. Hanaa Edwar, Secretary-General of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association, for their respective briefings and for attending today's meeting.

Armed conflicts severely affect civilians, who are at the mercy of the indiscriminate use of weapons of all types, both in rural areas and in densely population urban zones. In many circumstances they are seen as military targets. According to the Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2018/462), more than 50 million people in urban zones are currently affected by armed conflicts. The use of explosives caused the deaths of more than 42,000 people in 2017, of which 31,904 were civilians.

In addition to injuring and killing people, armed conflicts have other consequences for the civilian population, including forced displacement and sexual violence. With regard to displacement, as the Secretary-General's report describes so well, that was one of the characteristics of conflict in 2017. It is worth noting that an alarming number of 65 million people were forcibly displaced in 2016 alone. We also condemn and deplore the confirmed increase in cases of sexual violence in 2017.

Children are the most vulnerable segment of the population in all those situations. They are disproportionately affected by armed conflicts and their consequences, whether sexual violence, abduction, recruitment or forced displacement. Therefore, Bolivia emphatically condemns any kind of violence, attack or threat against the civilian population or against hospitals, schools, health-care facilities, infrastructure for water and energy supply, and humanitarian personnel, including doctors who risk their lives to help the civilian population embroiled in armed conflict.

As we have said, armed conflict disproportionately affects the civilian population. In the case of Yemen, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), more than 22 million of the 27 million inhabitants will require some form of humanitarian assistance in 2018 — 1 million more than the previous year — of which 7.5 million will need nutritional support, including 1.8 millions boys and girls. In Palestine, again according to OCHA, 73 people were reported dead and 8,154 injured in the course of 2017, both in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. In addition, in the past seven weeks and since the start of the Great March of Return, more than 100 deaths have been reported, among them 13 children — more than half of whom died just on 14 May. Regarding Libya, according to data from the International Organization for Migration, in 2017 at least 2,824 Libyan citizens died or disappeared in the Mediterranean Sea in their attempt to flee the conflict in that country.

Those are only some data that reflect the negative effect of armed conflict on the civilian population. In that regard, and to address that regrettable scenario, concrete initiatives have been taken, such as resolution 2286 (2016), which seeks to protect the civilian population and humanitarian personnel during armed conflicts and to guarantee their fully secure deployment, as well as ensure the protection of civilian infrastructure, among other things. In addition, the Agenda for Humanity, proposed by the United Nations, encompasses five points on which the international community must work in order to alleviate humanitarian suffering and mitigate the risk and vulnerability of the civilian population. It should be noted that the agenda includes conflict prevention, respect for international humanitarian law and work with the most vulnerable populations. Moreover, the Health Care in Danger initiative, launched in 2011 by the International Committee of the Red Cross, aims at addressing the problem of violence against patients, health workers, facilities and vehicles, to strengthen safe access to health care and to provide health care in armed conflicts and other emergency situations.

Despite those initiatives, we believe that the disproportionate impact of armed conflicts flows from a failure to implement international law, including international humanitarian law, and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

It should be recalled that international humanitarian law and its principles of impartiality, neutrality, humanity and independence were developed precisely in response to violence in armed conflict, and must be observed regardless of political or military disputes. It is important to mention that some of those acts may be considered war crimes or crimes against humanity, and are therefore subject to prosecution before the International Criminal Court. We call on all States to ratify the Rome Statute to ensure its universality and put an end to impunity.

We welcome the decision of the Palestinian Authority to request the International Criminal Court to investigate possible war crimes committed by Israel, the occupying Power, in occupied Palestinian territories, including the Gaza Strip. We also encourage all States to ratify the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005, so as to facilitate humanitarian assistance and unrestricted access.

Our approach to armed conflict should be focused on preventive action — including identifying potential conflicts and threats to civilians — since the most effective way to protect civilians is to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and the resumption of armed conflicts. Bolivia therefore advocates the use of peaceful means for the settlement of disputes established by Charter of the United Nations, such as negotiation, mediation, conciliation, prevention and legal settlements for the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Finally, as Mr. Daccord and Ms. Edwar are at this meeting, Bolivia would like to pay heartfelt tribute to humanitarian workers, who often put their own lives at risk or make the ultimate sacrifice, for their tireless efforts to prevent or mitigate attacks on civilians in armed conflict.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China commends Poland's initiative to convene this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We welcome Minister for Foreign Affairs Czaputowicz to New York to preside over this meeting. I would like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres, International Committee of the Red Cross Director-General Yves Daccord and the non-governmental organization representative, Ms. Hanaa Edwar, for their briefings.

Civilians bear the brunt of war in armed conflict. At present, the international security situation remains grim. In some regions, armed conflict continues to cause heavy civilian casualties. Local medical personnel are attacked and medical facilities are destroyed on an ongoing basis. The international community is gravely concerned about this situation. The parties concerned should adopt pragmatic and effective measures to ensure the safety of civilians in conflict. I would like to highlight the following points.

First, we must address both the symptoms and the underlying causes, strengthen prevention and try to ensure the protection of civilians by tackling the root causes of conflict. Effectively preventing armed conflict offers the best protection for civilians. The Security Council, which lies at the heart of the collective security mechanism, should genuinely fulfil its important responsibility of maintaining international peace and security, actively encourage preventive diplomacy and facilitate the settlement of conflict through political means so that civilians can be spared the scourge of war.

The international community should take concrete actions to solve the underlying problems that give rise to conflict. All countries should raise awareness of the fact that we are in a community with a shared future of humankind; we advocate the philosophy of global governance characterized by extensive consultations, joint contributions and shared benefits; and work hard to create a peaceful and stable international environment.

Secondly, the Governments of the countries and the parties to a conflict must live up to their responsibilies to protect civilians. Governments have the primary responsibility for protecting their civilians. The international community can provide constructive assistance, but it cannot replace the role of the Government of the country concerned. All parties to any conflict should respect international humanitarian law, implement the Council's resolutions on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, fulfil their obligations to protect civilians and ensure humanitarian access. Any act in armed conflict that, among other things, threatens or attacks civilians in violation of international humanitarian law should be investigated and punished by the country concerned according to the law.

Thirdly, United Nations peacekeeping operations must work strictly within the parameters of the Council's mandate in fulfilling their responsibility to protect civilians. The mandate of peacekeeping operations to protect civilians is no substitute for the responsibilities and obligations of the Government of the country concerned and of the parties to the conflict. When drawing up a mandate for a peacekeeping operation, the Council should holistically take into account a whole raft of factors, including the context and needs of the host country and the capacity and conditions of the peacekeeping mission, so as to ensure that the mandate is clearly articulated, realistic and feasible. Missions should formulate clear strategies and action plans in the light of the situations on the ground, strengthen internal coordination and ensure the effective implementation of the mandate. Regional and subregional organizations, such as the African Union, have unique local advantages and special roles to play, which should be fully leveraged to generate synergy with United Nations peacekeeping operations, strengthen information sharing and policy communication and help the host countries better protect their civilians.

Fourthly, humanitarian operations should respect the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the United Nations humanitarian assistance guidelines. Humanitarian assistance agencies and medical personnel have been rescuing the dying and treating the wounded in armed conflict. We pay tribute to their work.

Humanitarian operations should remain neutral, objective and impartial, fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of host countries and promote their humanitarian character and professionalism, so as to win the understanding and trust of all parties and avoid becoming embroiled in conflict. That also helps secure the safety of humanitarian workers and medical personnel and facilities in conflict areas.

The United Nations should fully play its coordinating role, maintain communication with all parties to any conflict, strengthen guidance for humanitarian workers and create conditions for timely and safe humanitarian access to ensure the effective implementation of humanitarian relief operations.

Mr. Djédjé (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire thanks the Polish presidency of the Security Council for organizing this ministerial debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

My delegation would like to welcome the presence of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland among us today and to congratulate him on his excellent conduct of our work. My country also thanks the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for the quality of his report (S/2018/462) and takes note of his relevant recommendations to improve the protection of civilians in conflict situations. My delegation would like to express its appreciation to Mr. Yves Daccord and Ms. Hanaa Edwar for their constant commitment to making the protection of civilians a primary concern of the international community.

Almost two decades after the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), which enshrines the inclusion of the protection of civilians at the heart of the Security Council's agenda, there is no doubt that considerable progress has been made in strengthening the international normative and institutional architecture aimed at protecting civilians, including humanitarian personnel, from atrocities committed during conflicts.

My country regrets, however, that in different parts of the world, multidimensional situations of crisis and conflict are causing great loss of human life and massive violations of human rights, in particular of such vulnerable persons as women and children. Sexual violence and the systematic use of explosives in urban areas have become real weapons of war in the hands of State and non-State actors alike, in contempt of international humanitarian law and of human rights. In addition, the persistence of political crises and the proliferation of weapons, as well as changes in the typology of conflicts due to the emergence of asymmetric actors such as terrorist groups and cross-border criminal networks, render more complex the challenges to be overcome in order to strengthen protection for civilians in conflict.

The deterioration of the protection of civilians, correctly described in the report of the Secretary-General, challenges us. It stresses the need for urgent measures at the national, regional and international levels to ensure strict compliance with international standards and practices for the protection of civilians.

Côte d'Ivoire endorses the Secretary-General's recommendations to Member States concerning the adoption and implementation of national strategies to strengthen protection for civilians. Having experienced the difficulties of a post-electoral armed conflict and its harmful effects on civilian populations, the Ivorian authorities are fully aware that the protection of civilians must necessarily begin with the training and heightened awareness of all concerned.

On the strength of that conviction, Côte d'Ivoire has adopted a preventive approach since the end of the post-election crisis. It prioritizes capacity-building and awareness-raising among national security institutions with respect to international standards for the protection of civilians and assistance to internally displaced persons. With the implementation of the national strategy for security sector reform and the adoption of the military programming law, the Ivoirian Government is concretizing its desire to make the national armed forces a republican institution at the service of peace, respectful of human rights and committed to a new social pact based on mutual trust with the civilian population.

As a signatory to the Oslo Convention, the Arms Trade Treaty and the Economic Community of West African States Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials, Côte d'Ivoire has supported its security sector reform with concrete measures in the area of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants. As part of that same preventive approach, my country has proceeded to destroy and secure stockpiles of weapons, with the support of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire and international partners.

With the adoption of resolution 1894 (2009), of 11 November 2009, the Security Council recognized that peacekeeping operations are an important tool at its disposal for ensuring the protection of civilians. Also, the Council reiterated its commitment to addressing grave violations of international humanitarian law and of human rights.

Because they have the legitimacy to act on our behalf and also have the resources and a range of tools to do so, peacekeeping operations are undoubtedly the best instrument to ensure effectively the protection of civilians and humanitarian personnel in countries in conflict. It is that profound conviction that motivates the unreserved support of Côte d'Ivoire for the Action for Peacekeeping initiative, whereby the Secretary-General intends to carry out the necessary reforms to improve United Nations peacekeeping operations.

The protection of civilians and humanitarian personnel, as prescribed by international standards, is possible, effective and sustainable only in a supportive environment, based on a political process for crisis resolution and peacebuilding to which the parties to the dispute subscribe freely. Côte d'Ivoire is convinced that United Nations peacekeeping missions can effectively contribute to the prevention of atrocities against civilians, including by acting as ceasefire monitors and as facilitators of political dialogue and national reconciliation, as well as by supporting transitional justice.

Peacekeeping missions are effective tools for promoting the rule of law through monitoring, reporting on human rights violations and supporting the effective implementation of accountability mechanisms. They also create favourable conditions for the provision of humanitarian assistance and the safe, dignified repatriation of refugees. Peacekeeping operations also have human and logistical resources that facilitate preventive tactical deployments in areas with high potential for violence against civilians. Côte d'Ivoire is therefore pleased that eight of the 15 peacekeeping operations deployed around the world have mandates and components dedicated to the protection of civilians.

On the eve of the twentieth anniversary of its inclusion on the Security Council's agenda, the protection of civilians remains a matter of concern for the international community. Despite the many persisting challenges, Côte d'Ivoire shares the hope expressed by the Secretary-General in his report and remains attentive to his appeal to States Members of the United Nations and all actors to step up efforts for improved protection of civilians in conflict. That is a noble cause, and it is a part of our responsibility: the maintenance of international peace and security.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): Allow me to thank the Secretary-General for his passionate plea against impunity. I should also like to thank Director-General Daccord for his passionate plea for international humanitarian law, and Ms. Edwar for her passionate plea for humanitarian action. I also thank the presidency for having organized this debate and for having invited those excellent briefers. They spoke to our hearts.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union, as well as with those to be made by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians and by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect.

The Netherlands supports the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his latest report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2018/462).

I will focus on three fundamental challenges the Council needs to address urgently. The first is breaking the vicious cycle between conflict and hunger, second is protecting medical facilities and personnel, and the third is to improve the performance of peacekeeping operations. I will illustrate the three points with examples from South Sudan, where we see one of the most emblematic and dangerous situations in that context, for civilians and humanitarian personnel alike.

My first point is breaking the cycle of conflict and hunger. Starving the civilian population as a method of war constitutes a grave violation of international humanitarian law. It cannot remain unpunished. In South Sudan more than 5 million people are suffering from serious food insecurity caused by more than four years of ongoing armed conflict. Crises in other countries show similarly alarming figures. As the Secretary-General also emphasized in his report, that is a worrying threat to international peace and security. The Council therefore has a clear responsibility to act.

In the short term, food insecurity and civilians' suffering are exacerbated. In the longer term, entire generations are raised in hunger, thereby hampering sustainable development and peace. It is therefore important that the Council condemn starvation as a method of warfare. Rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access is essential in that context, as well as accountability for perpetrators of such crimes. Compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law is necessary for protecting civilians affected by conflict-induced hunger. In the Netherlands, we are in the final stages of amending our own international crimes act. We will include the war crime of intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, including by wilfully impeding relief supplies. We would be happy to share our legislative experience with other States Members of the United Nations.

My second point concerns the need for the protection of medical facilities and personnel. A despicable trend today involves attacks against medical workers and health-care centres. It is deeply saddening to see how their protected status under international humanitarian law is being ignored by some parties to armed conflict. We express our great appreciation for all the international and national aid workers who risk their lives to provide assistance for people in need. The Council demonstrated its commitment by adopting a breakthrough resolution in 2016 — resolution 2286 (2016). Yet, thus far, that has not led to any significant changes on the ground. Let me cite as an example the attacks on and looting of health centres in South Sudan. According to the report (S/2017/821) of the Secretary-General on children in armed conflict, in that country, at least 28 attacks against medical facilities took place in 2016. Parties to the conflict in South Sudan carried out those attacks on hospitals in which malnourished children and pregnant women were being helped. Such incidents also take place in other countries, including Syria and Yemen, to name just two.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands therefore supports the World Health Organization in several pilot countries to set up a global system for data collection on attacks on health care. Based on that information, the international community, including, in particular the Council, should step up its coordinated efforts to ensure accountability for such international crimes.

Where national jurisdictions fail, we call for using the Council's competence to refer situations to the International Criminal Court We agree with the plea that the Secretary-General made to that effect just moments ago. For the time being, mechanisms need to be put in place that analyse information and prepare case files that could be used for criminal prosecution, such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria and the Investigative Team for Iraq. As Ms. Edwar just said,

> "[T]here must be accountability for all the harm committed ... by all parties to the conflict".

We agree, and we need for those crimes to be referred to a court.

My third point concerns the need to improve the performance of peace operations. Current conflicts require increased professional performance related to the protection of civilians by peacekeepers. We welcome the initiatives taken by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan to create a protective enviornmnet following incidents that took place in Juba in 2016. Detering sexual and gender-based violence is of particular importance. As my colleague from Côte d'Ivoire just said, we welcome the Secretary-General's efforts to improve the performance of peacekeepers. His Action for Peacekeeping initiative deserves the support of all States Members of the United Nations following last week's adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2018/10 to that effect. We support his renewed focus on the accountability of senior leadership for the protection mandate's implementation and his commitment to address underperformance by peacekeepers in that context.

Of course, training is key. That is why, together with the United States, Rwanda and the United Nations, we took the following initiatives this year. We successfully organized two integrated courses on the protection of civilians for peacekeeping personnel from several countries, and we invested in the predeployment training of other countries' peacekeepers. Moreover, as an endorser of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, we join the Secretary-General in his call for additional signatures. If additional States endorse the Principles, the professional performance of staff in implementing the protection-of-civilians mandate in peacekeeping operations will be improved.

In conclusion, more than 150 years have passed since the founder of the Red Cross, Henry Dunant, wrote *A Memory of Solferino*. Shocked by the suffering that he saw on the ground, he proposed the establishment of voluntary relief societies, and he laid the foundation for international humanitarian law. The book was decisive in the establishment of the International Committee of the Red Cross and in concluding the Geneva Conventions. His testimony of the horrors of war continues to apply to many current conflicts. We pay tribute to his legacy. Today's debate should strengthen our resolve to ensure that international humanitarian law is respected. The United Nations was established to guarantee an international legal order that protects civilians from the scourge of war. It is up to us to deliver on that mandate, and up to the Council to ensure that international humanitarian law is respected and that impunity not prevail when it is violated.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, allow me to commend the Republic of Poland for its skilful leadership since assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of May, and express our gratitude for the holding of this fundamentally important open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I would also like to take this opportunity to convey our thanks for the informative briefings by Secretary-General António Guterres; Mr. Yves Daccord, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross; and Ms. Hanaa Edwar, Secretary-General of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association.

The following statement on behalf of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea is aligned with the statements to be delivered by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and by Ms. Fatima Kyari Mohammed, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations.

As previous speakers explained, armed conflicts are increasingly complex, asymmetrical and posing new challenges as they expand to urban areas. The expansion and mobility of terrorist groups, extremists and organized crime further augment that complexity. Those new scenarios entail the increased vulnerability of civilians, which undermine their dignity, humanity and resilience, and also limit the capacity and work of Member States, humanitarian personnel and peacekeepers during armed conflicts. Equatorial Guinea firmly condemns violent attacks and threats directed against civilians in armed conflicts, and expresses its deep concern about the direct and indirect effects of those attacks on people and their communities. We call for those responsible for such acts to be brought before the relevant international judicial institutions to answer for their crimes.

During 2017, in many armed conflicts, thousands of civilians lost their lives from the use of high-powered explosive and chemical weapons. Many survivors not only suffered serious injuries, but also witnessed the destruction of their homes, vital infrastructure and social spaces, which are essential to maintain a dignified, humane and productive life. Many others fell victim to the strategic use of sexual violence and hunger as weapons of war, terrorism, torture and repression. Children have suffered grave human rights violations, and it is estimated that more than 65 million people have been forced to leave their homes and become displaced. Tragically, many civilians have disappeared without a trace.

In accordance with the common position of the African Union, Equatorial Guinea believes that, in order for Member States to be able to protect civilians during armed conflicts, it is imperative to support them in their efforts to prevent or avoid the escalation or recurrence of conflicts through initiatives that facilitate their sustainable development and peacebuilding. That would strengthen their capacity to invest in the resilience of their peoples and in prevention to better cope with humanitarian emergencies that result not only from armed conflicts, but also from, inter alia, unexpected climatic phenomena and the impact of global financial crises. In that regard, Equatorial Guinea reaffirms that the protection of civilians in armed conflict is the primary responsibility of Member States, and recognizes the vital work of United Nations peacekeeping operations in supporting Member States and humanitarian organizations to that end.

With respect to what I previously mentioned, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea believes that respect for, and compliance with, the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations must be an essential condition for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, especially respect for the national sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the countries where conflict is taking place. The protection of civilians must never be politicized. The protection of civilians is an undeniable responsibility of all parties to conflict; however, Governments bear the primary responsibility in that regard.

For that reason, we call on the parties to existing armed conflicts to comply with their obligations under international law, as appropriate, and international humanitarian law, under the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the relevant obligations under the Additional Protocols of 1977 and 1999. We therefore also call for the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of the wounded and sick and medical and humanitarian personnel in conflict situations.

Furthermore, we call upon humanitarian organizations and their personnel to also respect international humanitarian law and the laws of the Member States in which they operate, including respecting the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, as well as the sovereignty of Member States, set out in the annex of General Assembly resolution 46/182. We also call for recognition of the contribution of the African Union and African countries to the continental and global humanitarian architecture, in particular to displaced persons and refugees as a result of armed conflict and other humanitarian crises, and call for the catalysing of partnerships between the United Nations and the African Union to that end.

We welcome the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/462) to promote respect for international law among the parties, as well as good practices. We completely agree with him that the best way to protect civilians is to prevent and end conflicts. We call for exploring how to strengthen the capacity of peacekeeping operations to support Member States, at their request, in implementing those recommendations, within the framework of the reform of the United Nations peace and security pillar.

Finally, Equatorial Guinea expresses its deepest solidarity with the victims of armed conflicts and pays well-deserved tribute to the efforts of Member States to protect civilians during armed conflict, especially in developing countries and those most in need. We furthermore commend the firm commitment, courage and solidarity demonstrated by the humanitarian and health personnel of the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the other humanitarian organizations present here with whom they carry out that important work. We believe it is of the utmost importance that this issue remain on the agenda of the Security Council.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Madam President, for convening this important open debate to discuss this essential topic. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing today, as well as Mr. Yves Daccord, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and Ms. Hanaa Edwar, Secretary-General of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association, for their respective briefings.

Today's topic of debate — the protection of civilians in armed conflict — is of particular importance to the international community, especially in the light of the existence of armed conflicts in many countries of the world. Economic, political or social reasons give rise to such conflicts. Unfortunately, they lead to an enormous loss of innocent human life, even though civilians are not parties to the conflicts. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/462) indicates that the situation of civilians in areas of conflict is alarming. He calls on us to find a solution to prevent such a loss of human life and put an end to hostilities, the targeting of civilian facilities, forced displacements and the use of sexual violence as weapons of war.

When it comes to putting an end to human suffering, our responsibility as members of the international community and the Security Council is even greater. In order to find a viable solution and end impunity, countries supporting parties to a conflict, or providing them with weapons, should play a key role in helping to end violations committed against civilians. We call on countries with influence to present their military support and arms sales contracts in strict adherence to international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the continuation of conflict and lack of lasting solutions increases the number of displaced persons and those in need of humanitarian assistance. As those present are aware, conflict areas are often difficult to reach. We therefore call on all countries concerned and armed groups to honour their moral and legal obligations to make it possible for humanitarian assistance to reach those areas without any obstacles, especially given that the number of people in need is constantly increasing.

In the Syrian crisis, for example, as members of the Council, we achieved the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) for a ceasefire for a period of no less than 30 days, without any delay, in order to make it possible for the United Nations and its partners to provide humanitarian assistance and evacuate the sick and wounded, in accordance with international law. Unfortunately, to date we have been unable to enforce that resolution. Once again, we call for a halt to all attacks on civilians and populated areas, as well as medical centres in Syria.

When it comes to providing humanitarian assistance to civilians, we are pleased with the efforts of the international coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen to help our brother country. Those efforts continue through the global humanitarian assistance provided for Yemen, including the generous contributions from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the State of Kuwait, which make up more than 50 per cent of the contributions announced at the donor conference in Geneva last April.

Next year, we will commemorate 20 years since the inclusion of the protection of civilians on the agenda of the Security Council. It is timely to reflect on the progress achieved so far. It is very regrettable that while we are marking that twentieth anniversary, we have not managed to resolve one of the most long-standing violations against unarmed civilians, that of our brother people of Palestine. The Palestinian people are suffering. They are being persecuted by Israel, the occupying Power, which continues to carry out systematic and repeated brutal acts against them, such as those that took place last week against unarmed demonstrators exercising their legitimate right to freedom of expression in Gaza. Those abuses resulted in the deaths of more than 61 civilians, including eight children under the age of 16, and left 3,000 injured. We want to remind the Council that Palestinians, including children, continue to be detained in Israel prisons. We condemn all such violations by Israel as flagrant breaches of the norms of human rights and of all international standards. As States Members of the United Nations, it is our duty to bring an end to an occupation and a conflict that has persisted for more than 50 years.

The Charter of the United Nations stipulates that States and their peoples have a right to enjoy security. We have to wonder if that is a right for some people, but not others. If the answer is that all peoples have that right, then Israel, as the occupying Power, must respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law and protect Palestinian civilians. A few days ago Kuwait submitted a draft resolution aimed at providing international protection to the Palestinian people in the occupied territories and the Gaza Strip. We hope that it will be unanimously adopted by the Council with a view to ensuring the protection of civilians during armed conflict.

One regrettable outcome of armed conflicts is the imprisonment and disappearance of civilians, an issue that the State of Kuwait pays particular attention to. We continue to lament the fact that some of our civilians and citizens are still missing, almost two decades after the invasion of Iraq. That is why it is so important that all parties to conflicts all over the world respect international humanitarian law by listing the names of detainees, facilitating communication between them and their families and protecting their graves so that their remains can be recovered by their bereaved families. Under international humanitarian law, detainees and missing persons are included in the category of those protected during conflicts. We call on all Members of the United Nations and parties to conflict throughout the world to respect human dignity and the fundamental rights of detainees during armed conflicts, and to provide civilians with legal and judicial guarantees and the humane treatment they deserve during detention. We support political solutions and efforts to realize the legitimate aspirations of people to live in dignity, safety and peace.

We support the role of the United Nations, particularly its peacekeeping missions, and urge it to prioritize the protection of civilians with clear mandates in accordance with resolution 1894 (2009).

We welcome what the Secretary-General has referred to as a large-scale global effort to reduce the effects of armed conflict on civilians. We welcome efforts to encourage military and civilian leaders to be accountable and ensure that proper training is provided. We also advocate that all violations perpetrated against civilians, war crimes and crimes against humanity be referred to the International Criminal Court.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking the Polish presidency of the Security Council for taking the initiative to organize today's very important debate on the protection of civilians, presided over by Poland's Minister for Foreign Affairs. I would also like to thank the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Yves Daccord, and Ms. Hanaa Edwar for their inspiring briefings. Lastly, I would like to thank the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his uncompromising briefing. From Afghanistan to Yemen, in Iraq, Somalia, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he painted a very dire picture of threats to mandates for the protection of civilians. International humanitarian law, which is designed to save civilians from the effects of hostilities, is being defied. It is the duty of all States to respect and enforce respect for international humanitarian law.

I would like to underscore the Council's achievements before addressing the progress that we still need to make in response to the Secretary-General's recommendations. First, I would like to highlight the commitment and achievements of the Security Council with regard to the protection of civilians. We are not starting with a blank slate. The Council has improved the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations mandates. In addition, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, analysis of threats considers both the military and civilian components of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in order to determine what their integrated response should be, including by deploying uniformed personnel, if necessary. The protection of civilians is essential during elections and the demonstrations that go on around them.

In the Central African Republic, we have strengthened the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic. Efforts are under way to provide it with increased resources and flexibility for protecting civilians, as the Amoussou report has requested. The attacks on peacekeeping operations related to protection are especially intense. Whether the components are military or civilian, they must have sufficient resources to meet their objectives, and that goes especially for human rights personnel, whose early-warning role is vital to the protection of civilians. But peacekeeping operations' operational performance is also essential. If they are to be able to protect civilians properly, they must be able to protect themselves with proper training, preparation and equipment. As the Secretary-General said, both aspects are inextricably linked.

We have also continued and stepped up our efforts to protect women and children. Thanks to the efforts of special representatives, force commanders and dedicated advisers in the various missions, genuine progress has been made. Child protection advisers, as is the case with MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, play a decisive role every day in liberating children. Their functions must be maintained.

The Security Council has been innovative through its establishment under resolution 2391 (2017) of the human rights compliance framework for the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), whose implementation has been one a factor in the Joint Force's success. We commend the commitment in that regard of the G-5 Sahel countries, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the relevant civil-society stakeholders. Tools such as these, which enable us to prevent civilian casualties and ascertain how they have been harmed can serve as an example and be used in other situations.

Beyond these, what are the efforts that must be made to improve the protection of civilians? First, the Council must continue to work to ensure that all parties in all zones of armed conflict respect their obligations under international humanitarian law. That is key. The Council could also strengthen its efforts to protect civilians in three specific areas. The first is the protection of medical missions and humanitarian personnel. In the light of ongoing attacks on medical personnel, on 31 October 2017 France put forward a declaration aimed at committing its signatories to taking concrete steps to implement resolution 2286 (2016). We welcome Germany, which has just endorsed the declaration, and urge all States to join our initiative. We must strengthen our action to protect all humanitarian workers, especially local actors, who are often on the front lines of violence.

The second area is the protection of journalists. Attacks on media personnel continue and should not be tolerated. Protecting them is a priority for France and deeply ingrained in our DNA. We welcome the designation of a focal-point network for United Nations agencies to enable them to ensure the protection of journalists in situations of armed conflict, in line with resolutions 1786 (2007) and 2222 (2015). The Security Council must continue to monitor the issue with special vigilance. France, in line with President Macron's statement to the General Assembly (see A/72/PV.4), calls for giving the Secretary-General a specific mandate in that regard.

With regard to the third area, the Security Council should take the situation of detainees and missing persons into account. The International Committee of the Red Cross must be able to exercise its mission to protect such vulnerable people. France would like to recall its commitment concerning enforced disappearances and urges Member States to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Ultimately, the effective protection of civilians depends on exemplary efforts by those doing the protecting and on effective support for the fight against impunity. It is essential that the people who implement protection set an example. Sexual violence, like human rights violations, cannot be tolerated. The credibility of military and civilian personnel, humanitarian actors and United Nations staff is at stake. We must ensure that they too are protected, and it is the Security Council's job to ensure that attacks on them are investigated and prosecuted.

The Council's contribution to the fight against impunity must also be effective. We have a responsibility to support national and international efforts in that regard. The Council must call for cooperation with fact-finding missions, commissions of inquiry and international criminal justice instruments, first among which, where the most serious crimes are concerned, is the International Criminal Court.

Lastly, the Security Council must make every effort to put an end to violations, without hesitating to resort to sanctions. It is in that spirit that we and our partners have proposed sanctions on those responsible for trafficking in human beings within the framework of the sanctions regime in Libya. We hope to arrive at a speedy consensus that will enable us to deal with acts that as disgusting as they are destabilizing.

The protection of civilians is primarily the responsibility of States. But owing to States' shortcomings, it is the Council's responsibility to work tirelessly on this issue. This is not just a moral imperative; it is also about enabling peoples to survive, preventing the escalation of violence, opening up spaces for political dialogue, and recreating the conditions for lasting peace. I urge the Security Council to come together around this shared objective and translate it into action.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank the Polish presidency, especially Poland's Minister for Foreign Affairs, for convening today's open debate on a priority issue, the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We appreciate the important briefings by Secretary-General António Guterres, Mr. Yves Daccord and Ms. Hanaa Edwar.

As a country, Peru is committed to international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We are party to the fundamental international instruments on both matters, whose provisions are duly reflected, developed and implemented in our domestic legislation. At the international level, we actively promote their progressive development, and in the Security Council we consider the responsibility to protect civilians a high priority, in line with international humanitarian law. We are therefore seriously concerned about the impunity that we see for violations of international humanitarian law today, in some cases where the Council is unable to live up to its responsibilities.

Accordingly, we stress that it is our moral and legal obligation to act together to put an end to the suffering that millions of people in various conflicts and regions around the world are experiencing, for different reasons. In that regard, we would like to highlight the fact that 116 States, including Peru and eight other members of the Security Council, have signed the code of conduct promoted by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, which commits us to acting in a timely and determined manner to prevent and put an end to heinous crimes. In that regard, we believe that every State's sovereignty implies a primary responsibility to protect its population, and that when national authorities fail to protect their populations, the international community, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, must take on that responsibility.

We emphasize that a number of peacekeeping operations deployed in accordance with the decisions of the Security Council have mandates to protect civilians, including from the actions of their own Governments' regular armies. The obligation of every State to comply with international humanitarian law includes ensuring the training of its armed forces for that purpose. Peru has taken various initiatives in this regard that are reflected in the efforts of our troops deployed in various peacekeeping operations.

As the Secretary-General reiterated this morning, prevention is the most effective way to protect, and we therefore stress the importance of seeing sustainable peace as a permanent objective, centred on the human person and on the institutions and processes required to prevent or resolve violent conflicts. Among other things, that involves full respect for the rule of law at the national and international levels. It is therefore essential that the Security Council, whose primary responsibility is the maintenance of international peace and security, pay attention to the root causes of conflict and the observance of human rights. It is equally essential to ensure accountability for the commission of heinous crimes.

The universalization of international criminal jurisdiction and the predictability of access to justice should enable more effective prevention of the suffering that conflicts too often inflict on civilians. In that regard, we encourage all States to accede to the Rome Statute and to cooperate with the International Criminal Court. We also urge that the Council refer situations to the Court where atrocities have been committed and access to justice and accountability must be ensured.

We would like to conclude by paying tribute to the various agencies and humanitarian workers, such as the Red Cross and the Blue Helmets, who are dedicated to protecting civilians, often at the risk of their own lives.

Mr. Kuzmin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Polish presidency for organizing today's meeting on the problem of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, a very important issue that we should be addressing. We would also like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres, Mr. Yves Daccord, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Hanaa Edwar for their contributions to our discussion.

We share the Secretary-General's desire to see us unite our efforts to prevent conflict and protect civilians. It is support for the central role played by the United Nations, international law and traditional spiritual and moral values that will enable us to make progress on a unified agenda and overcome our differences. However, to our great regret, today we are seeing an extremely damaging trend towards an unprecedented politicization of the humanitarian arena in international relations. Despite all our efforts, thousands of civilians continue to die during conflicts. The fact that a large percentage of the victims are women, children and the elderly, medical workers, journalists and humanitarian personnel is especially worrying. These people's grief instantly becomes a backdrop for political strategy games in which constructive dialogue is subsumed in a flood of unverified news items and primitive judgments. Accusations appear and the guilty are instantly designated. Some do not hesitate to support their accusations with blatant misinformation from dubious sources such as the notorious White Helmets, for example. Hordes of so-called investigators appear from somewhere with vague mandates from various bodies, in most cases conducting their investigations from a distance and on the basis of reports from specially selected mass media and information from the Internet. It is the rule for such so-called investigators to have their own so-called top-secret informants and sources who under no circumstances can be revealed. We are simply asked to believe them. Unfortunately, these games, which we have frequently been compelled to witness even inside our Organization, contribute nothing to achieving the noble goals of preventing and minimizing the suffering of civilians. Such double standards, alas, have been clearly evident in the information disseminated about the military campaigns in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan and other countries.

What is going on right now in Ukraine is particularly painful for us. We will talk about that in more detail on 29 May, when the Polish presidency is planning a special briefing on Ukraine. But given the topic of today's debate, I cannot omit to cite the tragic numbers of civilian casualties, which Poland's Minister for Foreign Affairs has also mentioned. As a result of the armed conflict unleashed by Kyiv against its own population in south-east Ukraine since April 2014, more than 2,500 civilians have perished, 105 of whom died in 2017 and 10 so far this year. As many as 9,000 people have been injured, and hundreds are missing without trace. There are at least 138 children among the dead, 109 of whom died in Donetsk and Luhansk. The intensity of Kyiv's shelling of residential areas has noticeably increased lately. A number of Western countries have played a not insignificant part in this through their open connivance in Kyiv's violations of the Minsk agreements, which are the only legal basis for a settlement of the situation in eastern Ukraine.

The activities of humanitarian agencies are an important factor in the protection of civilians. Their work should be founded on the Charter of the United Nations and the basic humanitarian principles and should supplement efforts to political solutions to conflicts. In that context, two of the fundamental principles at issue are respect for the sovereignty of States and non-interference in their internal affairs. We continue to be seriously concerned about attempts to freely interpret the norms of international humanitarian law with regard to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, as well as their association with all kinds of concepts. Just recently, one delegation on the Security Council pulled the concept of so-called humanitarian intervention out of thin air. A missile attack on the territory of another State was explained by humanitarian considerations, clearly out of concern for those being shelled, of course. I would therefore like to reaffirm our position that using any means of response with the aim of protecting civilians, particular any means involving the use of force, is possible only if it is sanctioned by the Security Council and is in strict accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations.

If I may, I would also like to comment on what the Polish Foreign Minister said regarding the proposed initiative to voluntarily give up the right of veto in the case of atrocities and the most serious crimes. As the Council is aware, the institution of the veto is a very important component of the system of checks and balances in the United Nations, and a core element of our mechanism for collective decision-making that encourages Council members to seek compromises. For those who possess it, the permanent members of the Council, having the right of veto is not just a prerogative, it is also a great obligation and responsibility. The use of the veto has more than once spared the United Nations from an association with dubious ventures that resulted in the suffering of civilians. The world frequently still feels the consequences of such ventures.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I would especially like to thank the Polish presidency for organizing this important open debate and to express my appreciation to Secretary-General António Guterres, Mr. Yves Daccord, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Hanna Edwar for their important contributions today.

Sweden aligns itself with the statements to be made later today on behalf of the European Union and by the representatives of Norway, on behalf of the Nordic countries, and of Switzerland, on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect.

In last Thursday's open debate on upholding international law (see S/PV.8262), my delegation asked, rhetorically, how it could be that we succeed in using the tools of international law in most areas yet fail in this most critical one — protecting the life and dignity of our fellow human beings. This morning, the briefers eloquently and powerfully outlined the consequences of that failure. They are not abstract. They are lives shattered and futures erased as a result of a reckless and unacceptable disregard for international law and the civilians whom it is there to protect. And we, the 15 members around this table, have a particular responsibility, individually and collectively, to reverse that trend.

The Secretary-General told us again this morning that preventing conflict and sustaining peace are his top priority. We welcome his efforts over the past year and fully support that agenda. Prevention is the most effective tool to ensure the protection of civilians. It is our first line of defence. But when prevention does not succeed, international humanitarian law should provide a safety net for civilians caught up in armed conflict. We commend the Secretary-General for his action-oriented approach to enhancing respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law and for promoting good practice.

Despite our efforts, unspeakable crimes continue to be committed. The use of rape and sexual and gender-based violence have reached new and horrific levels. The widespread constraints on humanitarian access by parties to conflicts and deliberate attacks against medical personal and humanitarian workers cruelly deprive civilians of the assistance that they so desperately need. The protection needs of women, girls, men and boys often differ. Integrating a gender perspective into the implementation of international humanitarian law and our targeted humanitarian responses is essential. The experiences from Mali, Iraq, Afghanistan and South Sudan affirm the importance of integrating a gender perspective across the operations of United Nations missions, including references to gender in Security Council resolutions and statements and collecting and analysing gender- and age-disaggregated data. In addition, creating a link between protection, empowerment and participation can help support sustainable peace and avoid the narrow perception of women as primarily objects of protection, as Hanaa Edwar said this morning.

The disproportionate suffering of children as a result of armed conflict must be highlighted. Boys and girls are killed and maimed, recruited as soldiers, as human shields or even as forced suicide bombers. Schools and health-care facilities are destroyed, impeding children's enjoyment of their human rights. It is essential that we protect children today to prevent new cycles of violence and conflict tomorrow. The children and armed conflict agenda is an important accountability mechanism. Its reporting and monitoring of grave violations against children in armed conflict are important elements not only for ending impunity, but also for engagement with parties to conflict. As Chairman of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, Sweden will continue to insist on action on this agenda in the Council.

The Secretary-General spoke about the need to break the vicious circle between conflict and food insecurity. We welcome the ongoing work of the Council on conflict and hunger, which we hope can lead to the adoption of a resolution in the very near future.

I would like to focus on three issues at the heart of the protection-of-civilians agenda.

First, there is an urgent need to advance the commitments set out in resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of health care in armed conflict and on turning the recommendations of the Secretary-General into action on the ground. In Syria alone, 112 attacks against medical facilities and workers took place in 2017. In addition, 645,000 medical items were removed from inter-agency cross-line convoys In Yemen, health infrastructure has deteriorated drastically during the conflict, and we are witnessing the breakdown of public institutions, including health-care services that have to make do with very scarce supplies. In Afghanistan, women make up the largest group of those unable to access health-care services as a result of violence.

The international community, including the Council, can and should act to protect medical care in armed conflict. International law must be respected, and violations of international law, including international humanitarian law, must be addressed.

We need concrete steps to improve monitoring and reporting mechanisms, as well as data collection. We are currently looking into how United Nations peacekeeping missions and military practice could be improved to more effectively protect health care. Together with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Swedish Red Cross, the Swedish Government will launch a project aimed at enhancing the ability of armed forces to meet their obligation to ensure the protection of and respect for health care in armed conflict while performing their duties.

Secondly, we welcome efforts to strengthen the protection-of-civilians mandate of United Nations peacekeeping missions. While the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians undoubtedly lies with the host nation, United Nations missions have a crucial role to play. In this regard, we need to build on positive experiences and best practices. We welcome the newly agreed accountability policy clearly stating the responsibility of senior leadership for strategically employing the protection-of-civilians mandate in the work plans of missions.

Thirdly, at the core of both the Secretary-General's and the President of the General Assembly's agendas are the global compacts for refugees and migrants. The number of people displaced by conflict continues to rise, and today's levels of forced displacement are unprecedented. Safeguarding respect for international humanitarian law, refugee law and international human rights law in these compacts will be crucial.

In practical terms, close coordination and solidarity across the international community is essential to effectively addressing the needs of migrants and refugees.

We support the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/462) and are committed to implementing them. Today the ICRC and Ms. Edwar have asked us to do more, so it is high time to step up. Waging war in violation of the rules seems to come at a very small cost; the cost is borne by innocent civilians. We must strive to create a world in which no one, neither Government nor armed groups, believe that they can violate without consequence the rules that we have all agreed on to protect civilians caught up in conflict. The Council has a unique role in changing the game. It is one we cannot abdicate or ignore.

The President: I wish to inform all concerned that we will be carrying on this open debate right through the lunch hour, as we have a large number of speakers.

I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Kyslytsya (Ukraine): Sir, Ukraine deeply appreciates the initiative of Poland to hold this open debate, as well as the fact that you personally are presiding over this meeting. We thank the Secretary-General for presenting his report on the issue of the protection of civilians (S/2018/462), as well as the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross for his presentation.

As I am about to deliver a statement in my national capacity, I also would like to highlight the fact that Ukraine aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

We welcome the fact that for the first time the dire situation of civilians in Ukraine affected by the Russian military aggression in the Donbas region of Ukraine was referred to in the report of the Secretary-General. Ukraine shares the Secretary-General's grave concern about the situations of armed conflict in many countries in which the civilian population, in particular women and children, suffers disproportionately as a result of active military operations.

However, what is really disheartening is that despite a near-universal recognition by States Members of the United Nations of the need for full compliance with international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict remains as topical today as it was in 1999, when the Council adopted resolution 1265 (1999). Almost two decades have passed, and we all continue to express concern, strongly condemn, urge, call for, underline and so on. Moreover, we are witnessing a worrisome trend of new and devastating conflicts emerging and the agenda of the Security Council continuing to grow.

In all fairness, many countries and international organizations, including the United Nations, have taken very concrete and practical actions to alleviate the suffering of civilians in numerous armed conflicts. However, the lack of comprehensive and enforceable action on an international scale hampers our progress in this area.

So long as impunity rules the day, so long as some States Members of the United Nations, including one well-known permanent member of the Security Council, could not care less about implementing the decisions of the International Court of Justice, the Council will be doomed to go in circles around the issue of the protection of civilians, addressing it but never really resolving it.

What is the solution, one may well ask. I think that we have to get real. In the absence of a supranational body to enforce international law, it becomes the joint responsibility of us all, meaning that no crime of aggression or other transgression against the international rule-based system can be tolerated under pretexts concocted just to protect one's own narrow interests.

In keeping with the request contained in the concept note for today's debate (S/2018/444, annex), I will highlight what my country is doing to provide the best possible protection for civilians as Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine enters its fifth year.

As was mentioned earlier, according to United Nations estimates, some 3.4 million people from the Donbas region now require humanitarian assistance and protection. With 1.5 million registered internally displaced persons (IDPs) since 2014 — the first year of the conflict — the Ukrainian State has increased more than six-fold its budgetary allocations for monthly cash payouts to those IDPs.

The Ukrainian authorities are doing their utmost to ensure the continuous functioning in the Donbas region of objects of critical infrastructure that benefit the local population. For example, the Donetsk Filter Station, located in the so-called grey zone, supplies potable water to almost 400,000 people on both sides of the line of contact. However, five members of its service personnel were wounded on 17 April after their car came under fire from Russian-backed forces. Ukrainian deminers have cleared mines and ordnance from more than 1,000 civilian infrastructure facilities and more than 150,000 explosive remnants of war, including almost 1,000 improvised explosive devices purposely set up by Russian-backed forces.

In 2017, an inter-agency commission on the application and implementation of international humanitarian law in Ukraine was established with the aim of identifying the most pressing humanitarian needs, setting concrete goals, monitoring the implementation of tasks and assessing efficiency in addressing the needs identified. All that is just a fraction of what has been done to help civilians during the ongoing military conflict instigated and fuelled by Russia, which continues to flood the Donbas region with its weapons and military personnel. Right now, the conflict may be in a low-intensity phase, but it is no less deadly. For example, on 20 February, a Ukrainian military medic, Ms. Sabina Halytska, was killed when riding in a vehicle clearly marked with a red cross that was struck by a Russian antitank guided missile. She was only 23. What is that if not a direct violation of resolution 2286 (2016), which the Council adopted unanimously in 2016?

Back in 2005, during a debate in the Security Council on the same subject that we are discussing today, one delegation emphasized the need

> "to stress the role played by the International Criminal Court and to recall the as-yet-untapped potential of the Fact-Finding Commission created in accordance with article 90 of the first Protocol Additional to the 1949 Geneva Conventions on protecting victims of war." (*S/PV.5319, p. 19*)

Despite the fact that I am quoting a representative of the Russian delegation, I would readily subscribe to every word. I deeply regret that, unfortunately, the position of one permanent member of the Council is not as permanent as it could have been in order to save the lives of many.

In conclusion, we call on all States and parties to armed conflict everywhere to respect international humanitarian and human rights law and to abide by the orders of the Court in The Hague.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. Raimondi (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Poland and especially its Foreign Minister, Jacek Czaputowicz, for organizing this debate. I also thank the Secretary-General, the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Secretary-General of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association for their briefings. Finally, I thank all previous speakers for their statements.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/462). We appreciate his recommendations and the three protection priorities he lays out. We must once again deplore the fact that, according to the report, civilians continue to be the primary victims in conflicts. The failure to distinguish between combatants and civilians results in civilian deaths, injuries and displacement, as well as serious obstructions to and even attacks on humanitarian assistance. The Security Council must therefore remain committed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict by promoting full respect for international law, particularly humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law, as well as the fight against impunity.

In that context, we must recall the obligations arising from the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, their Additional Protocols of 1977, the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, human rights law and refugee law, as well as customary international law. It is also essential to continue to include and enhance civilian protection within the mandates of United Nations field missions, and to ensure that they are clearly formulated and that the operations have the resources they need to function effectively and quickly. We also note the importance of ensuring that peacekeeping operations themselves comply with international humanitarian law. The Council's authorization of robust mandates and their implementation by peacekeeping operations must not compromise the fulfilment of their core mandate to protect civilians, or distract them from their mission based on the fundamental principles governing peacekeeping operations. Peacekeeping operations must have clear mandates and the resources to implement them effectively and in a timely manner.

With regard to humanitarian assistance, all parties to a conflict must make every effort to ensure effective and timely access to humanitarian aid, including supplies and materials. Such assistance enjoys special protection under international humanitarian law, and it is therefore worrying that in many situations humanitarian access is hampered or even denied. It is also worrying that, as the Secretary-General's report indicates, certain measures in the context of the fight against terrorism continue to affect humanitarian activities. In that regard, we reiterate the call made by General Assembly resolution 70/291 for States to ensure, in accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law, that counter-terrorism legislation and measures do not present obstacles to humanitarian activities.

Under international humanitarian law and Council resolutions, attacks of any kind on civilians — especially women and children — or other protected persons, schools, cultural heritage sites or places of worship, as well as the recruitment of children and the obstruction of humanitarian access, constitute violations of international law. We regret that two years after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), we have to keep reiterating that medical and hospital personnel must not be targeted and condemn the many cases where that has occurred. Argentina reiterates its call for resolution 2286 (2016) to be implemented as soon as possible, and urges States that have not yet done so to adhere to the Safe Schools Declaration, in support of which my country had the honour of organizing the Second International Conference on Safe Schools in March of last year.

The Security Council must remain committed to protecting civilians in armed conflict, as it has done in special cases for children, women and journalists, and to ensuring respect for international law and ending impunity for grave violations committed against civilians. In that context, we underscore the role the system plays in the area of children and armed conflict. The system must receive the necessary support to carry out that task.

Argentina reaffirms the preventive role of accountability mechanisms. Impartial mechanisms are essential for the investigation of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. In that regard, I would like to acknowledge the work of the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission provided for in Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, as well as the central role played by the International Criminal Court. We recall that, in accordance with the Statute of the International Criminal Court, the Court has jurisdiction over many of the attacks on civilian populations mentioned in the report.

Argentina believes it is essential to continue the debate on the setting up of new mechanisms to strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law and to generate a constructive, transparent and inclusive dialogue among States and other stakeholders. We therefore support the work of the intergovernmental process to strengthen respect for international humanitarian law, facilitated by Switzerland and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The existing regulatory framework for the protection of civilians must be translated into concrete results in the field. The Council must strengthen its efforts to find the best way to make that happen.

The President: I now call on the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia.

Mr. Janelidze (Georgia): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important debate against the background of a global protection crisis, as outlined by the Secretary-General in his most recent report on the protection of civilians (S/2018/462). Record high numbers of people around the world are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, a situation caused predominantly by conflicts.

Addressing the challenge of the protection of civilians requires collective action along the entire peace continuum, ranging from conflict prevention to strengthening governance and institution-building. The path to protection provided by the Secretary-General in his report serves as a valuable guideline for us to focus on. Therefore, let me echo the three priority areas, based on respective observations from my national perspective:

First, respecting international law is at the heart of resolving the Russia-Georgia conflict and addressing its humanitarian consequences. While Georgia is committed to that principle, its disrespect by the Russian Federation, as the occupying Power, is the major impediment to settlement of the conflict. Russia continues to violate the Charter of the United Nations and the main principles of international law, as well as up to 39 Security Council resolutions.

Ten years have passed since the Russia-Georgia war, and the Russian Federation has yet to fulfil its obligations under the European Union-mediated ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008. The only international security presence — the European Union Monitoring Mission — is unable to fully exercise its mandate because it is denied access to the territories that are under illegal military occupation by the Russian Federation. According to the fifth point of the agreement, the Russian Federation has to withdraw its troops and allow international security mechanisms to be established on the ground. Those factors have contributed to the creation of an environment that puts in danger the lives and basic rights of civilians living in and along the occupied territories.

Unfortunately, incidents resulting in blatant killings of civilians still take place. Last year a Georgian citizen, Giga Otkhozoria, was chased and killed by a so-called border guard at the Abkhaz occupation line, and earlier this year another Georgian citizen, Archil Tatunashvili, an internally displaced person (IDP), was brutally killed while in detention in the Tskhinvali region.

Respect for international law goes hand in hand with the question of accountability. Georgia, in full transparency, has cooperated with the International Criminal Court (ICC), conducted unprecedented investigations to investigate the crimes committed during the 2008 Russia-Georgia war and facilitated the opening of the ICC Office in Georgia. The non-cooperation and refusal to allow access to the occupied regions from the other side, however, hinders further progress in addressing the question of impunity.

Another practice in which Georgia has shown its constructive approach is the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM). The IPRM was created within the framework of the Geneva international discussions and meets regularly in both the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions in order to prevent and react to the incidents happening along the occupation line. However, despite the regular meetings in that format, responses to the major incidents were not always appropriate.

In that connection, I would like to thank the International Committee of the Red Cross for its essential role in Georgia in preventing disappearances, locating the whereabouts of missing persons and identifying and handing over human remains to families. With the help of the Committee, the remains of 162 people were recovered from 22 grave sites located throughout the region.

When it comes to the second priority area, my main message pertains to the urgency of allowing humanitarian access. Despite the full determination of the Government to protect its civilian population affected by the Russia-Georgia conflict, we are prevented from extending that protection to the population residing in Georgia's occupied regions. The civilian population in those territories are deprived of minimal safeguards for their safety and are stripped of their fundamental rights and freedoms, including, but not limited to, the right to freedom of movement, the prohibition of education in a native language, the right to health care and gross violations of the right to property. No international monitor is allowed to enter the occupied regions and provide credible information about the humanitarian and human rights needs on the ground. That should be totally unacceptable to the international community and the Security Council.

The third priority area, on preventing and finding durable solutions to the issue of forcibly displaced persons, has special importance for Georgia. While over 10 per cent of our population has been exiled, we do our utmost to improve the livelihoods of the IDPs, including by providing them with housing. However, the fundamental question of respecting their right to return and claim their property back home remains unresolved. As the world suffers from unprecedented flows of forced displacement, with the number of IDPs alone exceeding 65 million, how we as the international community address that humanitarian question is of immense importance.

Ensuring respect for resolution 2286 (2016) remains pivotal, but its effective implementation will require further action by the Security Council, including its permanent members.

In Georgia, after the 2009 veto on the continuation of the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia, we faced a vacuum and a need for the establishment of international security arrangements on the ground, which directly affect the protection of civilians.

Against the backdrop of ongoing conflicts and high casualties in many parts of the world, be it in Yemen, Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ukraine or elsewhere, we must step up our efforts to make a tangible impact on the ground. In order to prevent the repetition of those crimes, the international community must intensify its efforts to combat impunity and use all available mechanisms to ensure that the perpetrators are held accountable.

We fully support the Secretary-General in his endeavour to mobilize the United Nations and its Member States to strengthen the protection of the human rights of civilian populations in armed conflicts, and we call for the implementation of his recommendations to that end. Georgia stands ready to contribute to those efforts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): We thank the delegation of Poland for holding this open debate. I also thank the President for personally being present here today. We listened attentively to the remarks made by the Secretary-General on this issue. We also thank the other briefers for their valuable input, perspectives and recommendations.

Listening to the submissions, there is clearly no dearth of feeling around the Security Council table with respect to addressing issues related to the protection of civilians in armed conflict situations. Yet, judging from the heart-wrenching narratives that we hear, it is obvious that there is a crisis facing the implementation of that concept. While it would be historically incorrect to say that there was ever a time when civilians were entirely shielded from the harrowing effects of conflict, the human toll of conflict today is a tragedy that requires redress by translating the concept into feasible actions and operational responses.

Throughout history, ways have been sought to limit the effects of conflict. Respect for international humanitarian law and other relevant human rights laws by all parties to an armed conflict and ensuring safe and unhindered access for medical and humanitarian agencies to people in need of assistance are well-established norms. Hence it is not the absence of norms that is the cause of today's challenges, it is the inability to abide by established norms that is perhaps the reason for the dismal situation we face in addressing this multidimensional and cross-cutting issue.

While the rubric on the protection of civilians stretches over a vast canvas, in view of time constraints I will limit my remarks to the application of the concept to United Nations peacekeeping missions directly mandated by the Security Council. For if we cannot set our house in order and address the issues with the tool that the Council designs and oversees, then broader endeavours may be more difficult to address.

The need to protect civilians in the context of United Nations peacekeeping operations has gained prominence since the 1990s, as armed conflict situations evolved rapidly within the changing global geostrategic context from inter-State to more intra-State situations, often involving non-State actors and terrorist networks, and that has led to large-scale violence against civilians.

From the beginning, the issue has been a complex one because of the vastly different nature of the armed conflicts themselves, possible contradiction with the long-standing agreed principles of United Nations peacekeeping and the limitations of the mandates and the serious inadequacy of the resources made available for peacekeeping missions. The issue continues to be debated in the Security Council, which has adopted several resolutions and other documents focused on the concept. Those efforts have not really helped to address the main challenges.

The difficulties involved in achieving the aims of civilian protection are well known. The responsibility of protecting civilians lies, first of all, with the national authorities. Yet very little is done in terms of bolstering the societal capacities for protection. There is a tendency to assume that protection is about how civilians can be protected by others — that is, somebody other than those affected. That somebody could be the parties to the conflict, peacekeepers and humanitarian organizations. Strengthening national and societal mechanisms is of primary importance. Outside agencies can supplement those mechanisms, but cannot supplant them.

While nine of the current 14 United Nations peacekeeping missions include civilian protection among their mandates, this aspect is only one of many mandated components. By our count, that is one of, on average, 10 such mandates that each mission is individually expected to fulfil. Every time the Council reviews a peacekeeping operation, it must carry out a serious examination of whether the peacekeepers have the ability to do what they are expected to do in extremely trying circumstances.

It is clear that the expectation that United Nations peacekeepers can effectively ensure the protection of civilians in the absence of clear mandates is not realistic. Therefore, the Council's membership needs to frame mandates with clarity and specificity. The responsibility also lies with those deciding the resources to be made available to peacekeepers so that they are able to fulfil the tasks that they are mandated to do. The growing number of instances of serious attacks on peacekeepers and the high level of casualties suffered by them in various missions point to the difficulties of being able to implement so-called robust mandates in situations involving rival warring groups mixed with civilian populations. That also puts at risk the credibility and the image of the neutral presence of the United Nations in situations of armed conflict.

Conflicts where peacekeeping operations are deployed are inherently messy, complex and difficult. However, those factors should not be taken as an excuse to accept the devastating impact of conflict on civilians. A number of courses of action and mechanisms and processes are available to address the operational issues. It is up to the Council to harness them in a collaborative effort. For that, it is also useful to consider developing a normative architecture for civilian protection as part of a broader endeavour, a framework that is politically attuned but not politicized or seen as instrumentalized. It is only then can we move forward with cohesion to address issues that have exacted the heavy price in civilian lives.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uruguay.

Mr. Rosselli Frieri (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to thank the Polish presidency for holding this open debate. We thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland for his presence here today. I am also grateful for the Secretary-General's statement and his report concerning the protection of civilians and medical care in armed conflict (S/2018/462). Furthermore, I extend my thanks to the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association.

Uruguay associates itself with the statements to be delivered by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians and by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect.

The report of the Secretary-General summarizes the situation that affects millions of men, women and children in armed conflicts in one sentence. It says simply, "state of unrelenting horror and suffering". The attacks on innocent victims, who are killed or mutilated, and the selective and disproportionate bombardments against civilian infrastructure that are present in all conflicts are part of that tragic litany. In many cases, such attacks are carried out intentionally against education and health centres and against the wounded and medical personnel, which makes them all the more reprehensible.

I wish to focus on the protection of medical assistance in conflicts and on the need to achieve the effective implementation of resolution 2286 (2016). That resolution is an instrument that has the potential to improve the protection of medical missions in areas ravaged by war. However, two years after it was adopted, indiscriminate attacks and bombings of hospitals and medical personnel continue to increase, which represents deliberate aggression against the basic foundations of international humanitarian law. The data provided by the World Health Organization, which recorded 322 attacks in 2017, resulting in 242 deaths and 229 injuries among medical personnel and patients, is a sad illustration of that.

In order to move towards the necessary implementation of the resolution, Uruguay believes that it is essential to conduct independent, impartial and comprehensive investigations into specific incidents. The international system has at its disposal various investigative mechanisms that are not fully taken advantage of. It was mentioned more than once in the Chamber today that one such example is the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission provided for in Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions of 1949. The Commission has resources at its disposal and enjoys a permanent framework and group of independent experts to investigate grave violations of international humanitarian law. However, since its establishment, the Commission has encountered serious difficulties in its activation when the consent of States concerned is required.

Once again, in that way, the argument of sovereignty is used to hide facts and prevent the truth from being discovered. States and parties to conflicts must also support the work of fact-finding missions and commissions of inquiry established by the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. That kind of mechanism is important with regard to investigating and identifying those responsible for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law.

One such example was the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), established by the Security Council, which proved helpful in investigating incidents in Syria. Based on its investigations, it was positively determined that chemical weapons had been used against the civilian population, and it was also determined who was responsible for the use of those chemical weapons. Unfortunately, the Security Council was unable to reach consensus to renew the JIM mandate, whereby we no longer have an appropriate instrument at our disposal to investigate those facts.

Uruguay believes that it is of the utmost importance to establish a system that collects reliable and detailed information in specific cases involving attacks on health care in conflicts and to investigate the facts, while taking advantage of synergies among existing investigative mechanisms.

Accountability is another important aspect owing to its deterrent effect and because it makes it possible to end the culture of impunity surrounding the commission of such crimes. According to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, intentionally targeting hospitals and places where sick and injured people are gathered, as well as health-care facilities, constitutes a war crime. The gravity of such crimes obliges States not only to investigate, but also to take appropriate measures to prosecute and punish their alleged perpetrators.

Uruguay was the first country in Latin America to fully incorporate the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court into its domestic legislation, and therefore it calls on all States that have not yet done so to become parties to the Statute and fully cooperate with the Court. To our mind, the Council also has to assume its responsibility to ensure accountability when confronting such violations. To that end, it must use the instruments at its disposal, such as the imposition of sanctions and its power to refer cases directly to the International Criminal Court when appropriate.

In conclusion, I note that, in Latin America, concern about the fate of victims of armed conflicts is nothing new, but that it has been around since the early days of the struggle for independence of the Spanish-American colonies.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Giacomelli da Silva (Brazil): I thank you, Madam President, for organizing this open debate, and I extend my appreciation to the briefers for their presentations.

I wish to begin by reiterating Brazil's long-standing support for the primacy of politics, conflict prevention and non-military approaches. Our collective responsibility does not need to translate into collective security action in order to be effective. It is crucial to develop an understanding of what force can and cannot accomplish. The notion that civilians are more effectively protected by resorting to military action is not supported by any real evidence. More often than not, it exacerbates suffering and leads to negative humanitarian consequences. In the exceptional circumstances in which resolutions authorize it, military action should be limited to the mandate. The Council should demand enhanced reporting and monitor the implementation of such resolutions. Those troops might not be wearing blue helmets, but they act upon the authority and legitimacy of a blue text.

Protecting civilians is a core part of the mandates of many peacekeeping operations. Missions cut across diverse areas relating to the protection of civilians, such as gender affairs, the rule of law, security -sector reform, community violence reduction and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. A comprehensive approach to sustaining peace must start by simultaneously integrating peacekeeping and peacebuilding objectives, thereby recognizing the role of peacekeepers as early peacebuilders. We must ensure that peacekeeping missions have both the capabilities and the resources that they require.

Non-State actors, including terrorist groups, deliberately target civilians as a military tactic. Such violations warrant the strongest condemnation. At the same time, it is impossible to ignore the fact that violations of international humanitarian law have also been perpetrated by national Governments, including under the claim of protecting civilians. We cannot lose sight of concerns about the use of new technologies, in particular armed drones. Such technologies might be testing the limits of the principles of humanity, distinction, proportionality and precaution — not to mention the challenge to general international law when used extraterritorially outside conflict zones.

It is unacceptable to witness indiscriminate attacks on civilians, the destruction of cultural heritage and military action against schools and medical facilities. Brazil commends those who carry out medical activities during armed conflicts, while enduring harsh conditions to save human lives and minimize suffering on the ground. It is crucial that all parties to armed conflicts facilitate safe and unimpeded access for medical and humanitarian personnel.

The nature of warfare might have changed, but the rules of war have not. All parties to armed conflicts must comply with their obligations under international law, including the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. Violations must be investigated and their perpetrators must be held accountable. In that regard, Brazil reiterates the central role of the International Criminal Court and remains a steadfast supporter of the universality of the Rome Statute. We need to enhance humanitarian compliance and legal accountability. We would also benefit from enjoying a dedicated space for States to discuss international humanitarian law in a voluntary and non-politicized manner. Brazil calls upon all States to engage constructively in the intergovernmental process aimed at finding such a space and promoting valuable exchanges on international humanitarian law.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to stress the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all our efforts to protect civilians.

> "There will never be peace in the world as long as women do not help create it".

Those are not my words. They were voiced by Bertha Lutz, a member of Brazil's delegation to the San Francisco Conference in 1945. We are proud to co-organize a panel to be held today in the Trusteeship Council Chamber on the theme "Women and the Origins of the United Nations — A Southern Legacy".

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): Let me start by thanking Poland for convening this debate. We also thank the Secretary-General and the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross for their insightful briefings.

The rules of conduct of armed conflict are clearly codified and articulated in various conventions and legal instruments. Yet the cardinal principles of distinction and discrimination between civilians and combatants, military necessity and proportionality continue to be violated, and warring parties still operate with impunity. The legal framework is there. It is the persistent failure to comply with those obligations and to respect the rules of international humanitarian law during armed conflict that remains the abiding challenge. Whether it is plausible deniability or abuse, the grim reality is, when the beast of conflict roars, legal regimes fall silent.

Gone are the days when the impact of armed conflicts on civilians was limited to collateral damage. Targeted attacks, sexual violence, forced conscription and indiscriminate killings collectively serve to paint an extremely bleak picture of the human costs of modern-day armed conflict. Civilians, who should be the primary subject of protection, have become the principal objects of attack. The Geneva Conventions are violated, respect for human life is also violated, and civilians are used as human shields in occupied territories. Worse, perpetrators who commit such crimes are awarded honours by their military commands. Those crimes continue to be perpetrated in Palestine and in Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir — two of the oldest disputes on the agenda of the United Nations and the Security Council.

As an inevitable consequence of armed conflict, the international community is confronted with the challenge of increasing civilian casualties, as well as an ever-greater need for humanitarian assistance and protection for people displaced by it. According to the Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians (S/2018/462), last year alone the United Nations recorded more than 26,000 civilian deaths in just six situations of armed conflict, with 128 million people in dire need of humanitarian assistance and protection. Let me underscore five specific points in that regard.

First, the protection of civilians is a system-wide responsibility, but host countries bear the primary responsibility for the protection of all civilians without discrimination.

Secondly, violations are neither inevitable nor insurmountable. They can be mitigated by the consistent use of the entire range of national and international judicial and non-judicial means for promoting compliance with international humanitarian law and ensuring accountability. Military training, for instance, must include familiarization with the principles of international law governing armed conflict and a full understanding of the legal implications of commands issued and obeyed in situations of combat.

Thirdly, the lack of political will to fully respect humanitarian law and other applicable rules is the primary impediment to protecting civilians in armed conflict. Sustained pressure from those with influence over parties to conflicts can rectify that terrible wrong.

Fourthly, the protection of civilians, wherever mandated by the Council, is, and should be, a priority for United Nations peacekeeping operations. Pakistan is one of the world's leading contributors of troops to United Nations peacekeeping, and Blue Helmets from my country have contributed to many of its success stories in Africa, from Liberia to Sierra Leone. Our well-trained and professional peacekeepers have protected civilians, provided them with much-needed medical care and helped to rebuild their lives.

Fifthly, the Security Council, as the primary body tasked with maintaining international peace and security, should focus on the root causes of emerging and long-standing conflicts and find inclusive political solutions. Inaction by the Council in cases of foreign aggression and occupation produces situations where such crimes breed.

Finally, let me say that the goal of the protection of civilians can best be achieved by preventing the outbreak of armed conflict in the first place. Our collective efforts need to be geared towards that crucial goal. Otherwise, we will be treating only the symptoms, and not the cause.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Colombia.

Mr. González (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): As this is the first time I speak during Poland's presidency, I would like to congratulate your country and you, Madam President, on convening this debate.

After the statements delivered this morning by the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, by Ms. Hanaa Edwar and by my various colleagues who preceded me, I can only express my solidarity with the humanitarian and health-care personnel who contribute so much, generally in complex and violent contexts, risking their own lives to consolidate peace. That is a crucial issue, because, as the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/462) reveals, armed conflict, terrorism and violent extremism are increasingly taking their toll, with 128 million people in need of immediate humanitarian assistance.

In May 2017, in this very Chamber, Colombia underlined how even the barbarity of war has rules of obligatory compliance for the parties involved (see S/PV.7951). But when conflict deteriorates, the basic principles of humanity also deteriorate in attacks on those in the most vulnerable situations. The continuous deterioration of the atrocious humanitarian situations, which have been mentioned here, obliges us to comply with the pending task of implementing the mandate of resolution 2286 (2016). It urges us to a greater political commitment and a duty, before the obligations emanating from international humanitarian law and from respect for human rights by everyone, to stop the barbarism.

The Colombian State has adopted the sacred mandate to protect all civilians and provide the utmost respect for and protection to the medical missions that serve them, with the resolute and effective support of the United Nations. It has not been an easy task because, as my country has reiterated so many times here before, in a conflict that lasted more than five decades and ended with the Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace, international humanitarian law formed the indispensable basis for achieving that Agreement. At present, even with obstacles to overcome, we continue to make progress with the support of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, as reflected in the various reports presented to the Council.

The results of that comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians through peacebuilding efforts are evident. The objective is obvious if we stop to observe the positive impact of the implementation of the peace agreement with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, namely, the lowest homicide rate in 42 years, the fewest kidnappings since statistics have been available, 8,994 weapons surrendered to the United Nations and 1,238 weapons seized in 205 illegal warehouses.

In the midst of the armed conflict, Colombia adopted a series of international humanitarian law instruments that contributed to strengthening its role in the protection of civilians. Among them, today I would like to highlight the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention — an instrument that has contributed to the decontamination of 33 per cent of municipalities with anti-personnel mines, which has benefited 2.4 million people and cleared 6.1 million square metres.

Finally, the consolidation of the rule of law is the most solid foundation for creating conditions for the protection of individuals and the full enjoyment of their individual rights. The best context for that is a country at peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Hattrem (Norway): I have the honour of speaking on behalf of Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and my own country, Norway.

We would like to express our gratitude to Poland for holding this open debate.

Practical measures to increase compliance with international humanitarian law are of great importance to civilians caught up in conflict. They can no longer wait for possible future action. The lack of respect for obligations under international humanitarian law has long-term devastating effects on individuals and communities. How people are protected, or not protected, during armed conflicts has a major impact on prospects for peace and reconciliation, reconstruction, the restoration of basic services and civilian structures and the return and reintegration of displaced people.

I would like to mention a few examples of the practical initiatives and measures taken to increase compliance with international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians, supported by the Nordic countries. They are all examples of partnerships among States, practitioners, civil society and humanitarian organizations.

First, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has systematically addressed attacks on health care through the Health Care in Danger Initiative. It is an excellent example of building a community of action in the field, coupled with advocacy and cooperation at the global level with States and other international organizations. We encourage all States to support the implementation of the recommendations emanating from the initiative. Médecins Sans Frontières, Geneva Call, the World Medical Association and the International Council of Nurses all play a key role in awareness-raising, while also sharing knowledge and best practices. We urge all States to support the efforts of the World Health Organization to establish a single, standardized surveillance system to collect and disseminate high-quality data on attacks on health care. As we marked the two-year anniversary of the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) earlier this month, we call for its implementation.

Secondly, in June 2015, 37 States came together in Oslo to launch the Safe Schools Declaration. It includes a practical commitment to implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. That is part of our commitment to protect children during armed conflict. Civil-society organizations within the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack played a key role. We are encouraged that 74 States have now endorsed the Declaration and that States, international organizations and civil society are committed to its implementation. We urge all States to join and implement the Safe Schools Declaration.

Thirdly, dialogue with parties to conflict is key to enhancing the protection of civilians. States that are in a position to influence the situation on the ground should lead by example in that regard. We would also like to highlight the work done in conflicts by the ICRC, Geneva Call and others to engage armed forces and non-State armed groups in order to make them understand their obligations and act accordingly by changing their practices. The Deeds of Commitment, used by Geneva Call to engage armed groups to protect civilians, are great examples of practical measures based on knowledge and experience in the field.

Fourthly, the obligation for States parties to the Mine Ban Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions to clear contaminated areas and destroy stockpiles is a very concrete and efficient way to contribute to protecting civilians after conflict. A total of 29 States and one other area are no longer suspected of being contaminated with landmines since the Mine Ban Treaty was adopted, in 1997. Close partnerships between civil society and States concerned about the use of such indiscriminate weapons made that possible.

Fifthly, we should support the call by the Secretary-General to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas and to develop policies on the use of such weapons to avoid civilian harm. The report of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on existing policy and practice is an operational approach to the issue. We should aim for a clear international standard of practice. We stand ready to contribute to developing practical measures and guidance on the basis of lessons learned.

Sixthly, those who commit atrocity crimes must be held accountable in order to prevent future violations. All States have a responsibility to investigate and prosecute individuals who perpetrate atrocity crimes. In cases where States are unable or unwilling to prosecute, the Security Council should refer the situation to the International Criminal Court.

Lastly, essential to the protection of civilians is the recognition that women and girls are under particular threat in armed conflicts and that the participation of women in preventive action will greatly increase the effectiveness of such action.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I would like to thank you, Madam President, for choosing this very important agenda item.

I would also like to thank my colleague Mr. Jürg Lauber of Switzerland and to align myself with the statement he will deliver later today on behalf of the Group of Friends of Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. He will provide a more comprehensive view of this very complicated and vast subject. I would also like to align myself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union.

I would like to echo what many have already so eloquently stated, including the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, namely, that there is a major gap separating words and action. Our task is to bridge it. I need not recall the horrific situation in many countries where civilians are under extreme strain. We have seen the pictures of events in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Ukraine and many other places where human suffering is a daily occurrence. Again, we must bridge the gap between words and action.

I very much endorse the remarks made by the Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs, who stated that there are three areas on which we must work: prevention, protection and accountability. There can be no impunity for those who commit crimes that demonstrate disregard for the protection of civilians.

With regard to prevention, I would also like to say that, if elected to the Security Council, Germany will attempt to ensure that conflict prevention is featured more prominently on the Council's agenda.

Turning now to the specific case of the plight of the Rohingya, I believe that much more could have been achieved had the international community, in particular the Security Council, paid attention to the issue earlier on. We saw it coming. The situation would not be as disastrous as it is had the global community paid attention to the situation in Myanmar earlier. A very important step must now be taken. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, has an opportunity to visit Myanmar and support a structured dialogue between the Government and victims, including assisting the survivors of sexual assault in order to ensure accountability for those crimes.

To build on Ms. Edwar's remarks with regard to Iraq, the second step that should be taken in Myanmar is that of reconciliation. In that respect, I very much welcome the decision by the Secretary-General to appoint a Special Representative for Myanmar, the Swiss diplomat Christine Schraner Burgener. One of her objectives will be to facilitate reconciliation in the situation in Myanmar so that the Rohingya can safely return to their homes.

In addition to prevention, which, again, is an area where we could have done more, there is also the issue of protection. In that regard, I would like to refer to what the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross said this morning, and what our colleague from Norway highlighted, namely, the Health Care in Danger initiative. As health care is a key issue, this is one of the key initiatives that have to be taken forward. When we look at the conflict in Syria, for example, it is clear how much health-care institutions were subject to attack. That has to stop, and more has to be done.

Also with regard to protection, I would like to announce that today Germany is endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration, which we believe is also a very important initiative. As my Norwegian colleague rightly said a moment ago, it is key that we protect all educational institutions from attacks.

Peacekeepers constitute one of the most important elements in the context of protection. United Nations peacekeeping operations continue to be essential for the protection of civilians. In the Central African Republic, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in South Sudan, to cite but a few examples, it is often peacekeepers who stand between the civilian populations and their tormentors. The protection mandates that the Security Council assigns to missions therefore need to be more robust. At the same time, peacekeepers need to have adequate resources and be properly trained. And we have to see to it that mandates are implemented.

I think there is a lot that can be done, as was highlighted by the Santos Cruz report. The Secretary-General's proposals are aimed in that direction. However, I believe that discussions about cutting budgets for peacekeeping operations are not the right step forward, especially if the goal is for peacekeepers to actually fulfil their mandate and protect civilians.

The last point I wanted to make is to highlight that we think that New York and Geneva should work more closely together. We sometimes have the impression that New York and Geneva are not on two different continents, but on two different planets. For instance, the Human Rights Council has set up a group of experts to look into human rights violations in Yemen. I believe that the findings of that group could be highly relevant for our political discussions here in New York. We should make use of its results as they are presented.

In conclusion, we know from listening to debates in the Security Council that on many political issues there is a great deal of controversy, and sometimes severe polarization. But when it comes to the protection of civilians, I would appeal to the members of the Security Council to put aside political differences. In our view, a common objective should be to protect innocent civilians from harm and persecution.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): I would like to thank you, Madam President, for organizing today's important and timely debate, and the Secretary-General and the briefers for their insightful statements.

Next year will mark 20 years since the protection of civilians was placed on the Security Council's agenda. In an increasingly disaster-prone and volatile security environment, civilians are confronted with the most severe effects of conflicts. More than 26,000 civilian casualties were recorded in 2017 in just six emergency situations worldwide. Currently, 65.6 million people around the world have been forced to flee, which is an unprecedented number. Among them are nearly 22.5 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18. Millions of people have been denied access to such basic rights as education, health care, employment and freedom of movement. In our world, 20 people a minute are forcibly displaced as a result of conflict or persecution. Against that backdrop, as pointed out by the Secretary-General in his most recent report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2018/462), the most effective way to protect civilians is to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of armed conflict.

First, focusing on prevention or addressing the root causes of conflicts should be at the top of our agenda. We possess the adequate tools to address challenges to international peace and security. We should act accordingly and translate our legal commitments into practical actions. A case in point relates to the fight against terrorism. Terrorist organizations, whose primary aim is to inflict violence on civilian targets, do not feel bound by any international legal framework. Unfortunately, certain members of the international community fail to implement their commitments in the face of terrorist threats. We must look into ways to further improve and coordinate our joint fight against this scourge in all its forms and manifestations.

That effort should also include refraining from signing documents with non-State armed groups that will encourage them to use such documents as means of propaganda to claim legitimacy. We therefore believe that all international organizations and non-governmental organizations should refrain from drawing up any kind of documents, including so-called Deeds of Commitment, with terrorist organizations. Instead, reinforcing the legal framework for preventing and punishing recruitment activities by terrorist organizations should be the priority.

As indicated by the Secretary-General in his report, children continue to be disproportionately affected by armed conflict. It goes without saying that poverty and the lack of education are among the main drivers of radicalization. Our prevention efforts should also focus on those root causes by channelling a sound combination of humanitarian and development assistance.

Secondly, undoubtedly, the primary obligation for protecting civilians lies with States. However, the international community has a shared responsibility to also help protect civilians in situations where States fail to do so. We should step up our humanitarian assistance in order to address the acute needs of people in emergency situations.

In Syria, where we are witnessing one of the most dramatic and protracted humanitarian crises, Turkey will continue to give a hand to those in need. We will also continue our assistance to, and cooperation with, the United Nations in the cross-border delivery of humanitarian aid, which is indispensable for the survival of hundreds of thousands of affected people. Through the United Nations, we should spare no effort to enable safe, unimpeded and sustained delivery of humanitarian aid and services.

Medical evacuation constitutes another component of efficient humanitarian action. In 2017, the World Health Organization recorded 322 attacks in conflict-affected countries across the world. This month will mark two years since the Security Council adopted its landmark resolution 2286 (2016), which is solely dedicated to the protection of medical personnel in armed conflict. As one of the sponsors of the resolution, we call for its effective implementation, which has become increasingly important in view of the continuing disrespect for international humanitarian law.

Thirdly, hospitality towards those fleeing conflicts should be a moral and political principle that we should all uphold. In the face of the surge in forced displacement around us, we are all confronted with difficult choices in terms of helping those in need of protection. As a neighbouring country of Syria, Turkey deeply feels the multiple effects of the tragedy in that country. As the largest refugee-hosting country in the world, with more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees within our borders, we will continue to mobilize our resources for the well-being of these people. We call on the international community to take responsibility and provide shelter for, and ameliorate the living conditions of, millions of displaced people around the globe.

Upholding international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians are among the primary responsibilities of the Security Council in the maintenance of peace and security. Unfortunately, the Council's response far from meets expectations, in particular with respect to the most critical issues, such as Syria and Palestine. What we have witnessed in those two parts of the world is a total disregard for all the values that the United Nations system has striven to defend for more than 70 years and a clear violation of the principles of international law. There cannot be any excuse for targeting innocent civilians. We must act decisively and establish genuine accountability mechanisms in order to put an end to impunity.

This week, we will mark the second anniversary of the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit, which was a milestone in generating more than 3,000 commitments to strengthening the protection of civilians and the promotion of the centrality of protection. Taking this opportunity, we call upon all Member States and stakeholders to honour their commitments, which can make a real difference to the lives of the millions suffering from crises.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein): Protecting civilians in armed conflict is a universal obligation under international humanitarian law, not a policy decision by States. Targeting civilians, health-care providers, schools or other protected persons or facilities is a crime, irrespective of considerations of military necessity. Nevertheless, we have witnessed a gradual and dramatic erosion of respect for the most basic rules of warfare. It is our collective responsibility to reverse that trend through the special role entrusted to the Security Council, at the core of whose mandate is the protection of civilians.

The large-scale suffering of civilian populations continues in many ongoing conflicts — in Syria, Yemen, Myanmar and the Central African Republic, among other places. The many violations include starvation, sexual and gender-based violence as a method of warfare — often also committed against men and boys, such as in the Central African Republic — and attacks on medical workers and facilities, which continue to increase at an alarming rate despite the strong condemnation by the Security Council in resolution 2286 (2016). The continued lack of implementation of that resolution should be a call for action to the Security Council, and the membership as a whole, as the erosion of the international rule of law is of concern to all of us.

Preventing mass atrocities from occurring in the first place is the most effective protection of civilians. We are encouraged by the fact that 116 States have joined the code of conduct of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group on mass atrocity crimes. We hope that more States will soon subscribe to that important political commitment, especially those that are interested in serving on the Security Council. We will continue to work towards its consistent implementation by requesting its application and by engaging with the United Nations system to that end. We encourage the Secretary-General to continue to bring to the attention of the Council situations where atrocities are committed or where an outbreak of violence is likely, in line with the powers of his Office under the Charter of the United Nations.

The situation of the Rohingya in Myanmar is among the most pressing examples of such situations. We welcome the recent visit of the Security Council to Myanmar and Bangladesh. At the same time, the visit has not inspired a sense of urgency in the Council's actions. There is little indication that the Council will address the accountability dimension of the ongoing crisis. However, it is clear that ensuring justice is part of the conditions necessary to allow for the safe and voluntary return of the forcibly displaced Rohingya population. It is precisely for such kinds of situations that the International Criminal Court (ICC) was created 20 years ago. We commend the Court's Prosecutor for exploring the option of investigating the forced displacement of the Rohingya as a crime against humanity. However, we also continue to believe that the Security Council should use its competence to refer the situation — and therefore all crimes committed in the conflict — to the Court. The Council has so far shown an unfortunate inclination to separate the justice dimension from the humanitarian crisis when it seems clear that the latter cannot be addressed without the former. In our view, that will not work. That situation remains an' excellent illustration of the fact that the Council needs to address mass atrocities in order not only to protect civilians but also to do its work effectively.

In conclusion, let me echo the call of the Secretary-General, who this morning asked for the full support of all States for the International Criminal Court, and join the many speakers who called for the universal ratification of the Rome Statute. We would also like to remind the Council that armed conflict itself poses the greatest threat to civilian populations. From 17 July, which is the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the Court will have jurisdiction over an additional crime — the most serious forms of the illegal use of force. We therefore call on all States to ratify the Amendments to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court on the crime of aggression, thereby giving the ICC jurisdiction over that crime.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Hungary.

Mrs. Bogyay (Hungary): Today, as the line between international and internal armed conflicts becomes more blurred, vulnerable groups are deliberately and systematically targeted during the many conflicts facing us. The international community has the primary responsibility to step up all its efforts to strengthen respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.

Hungary aligns itself with the position to be expressed on behalf of the European Union, as well as with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect.

We would like to thank the Polish presidency of the Security Council for organizing this very important open debate.

Hungary believes that the best way to protect civilians is by preventing armed conflicts. We devote special attention to the principle of the responsibility to protect, as it is a core element of prevention. We must pay persistent attention to the warning signs of potential atrocity crimes, particularly serious violations of human rights in certain areas.

Hungary strongly supports utilizing the prevention mechanism of the Human Rights Council. As a member of the Council, one of our priorities is to work towards the prevention of such atrocity crimes and the promotion of the already existing tools of the international community. Accountability and ending impunity are key to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. In that context, we need to set up an effective accountability mechanism by enhancing the capacities of national institutions. Our attention must focus on empowering victims of armed conflicts.

At the international level, Hungary supports the work of the International Criminal Court, as well as that of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

As the ultimate guarantor of international peace and security, the Security Council has a major role in preventing and in adequately responding to violations against civilians in armed conflicts. Hungary is a member of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) group. We would like to encourage all Member States to sign the ACT code of conduct, which calls for refraining voluntarily from the use of the veto in the Security Council in cases of mass atrocities, genocides, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Hungary attaches great importance to the protection of women and children. We support international initiatives aimed at combating sexual violence in conflict. I would like to stress that women and girls are especially threatened by rape, forced marriage and sexual slavery. Their protection, return and safe reintegration into their communities, as well as the elimination of any related stigma, can be successful only in partnership with local communities and moderate religious leaders. Nor can we forget about the children born to survivors of rape. Ensuring birth registration and acceptance by family and community is key in that regard.

One of the most outrageous violations of international humanitarian law is the increase in attacks on civilian infrastructure such as health-care facilities and schools. Attacks on education, including on students, particularly female students, teachers and schools can have a dramatic impact on the lives of children, dashing their hopes for a better future.

Ensuring respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, especially as concerns women, children and their empowerment, is vital in bringing about long-term stability, peace and reconciliation, and creating an environment conducive to sustainable social and economic development.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Spain.

Mr. Moragas Sánchez (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to start by congratulating and thanking the Polish presidency of the Security Council for having recalled the special responsibility of the Security Council in reaffirming the importance of international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians. I wish also to thank Yves Daccord and Ms. Hanaa Edwar for their statements.

Spain aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union on behalf of its 28 member States, and by Qatar on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect.

Spain attaches the highest importance to the protection of civilians in its work at the United Nations. Violations of international humanitarian law, access-related problems, combating sexual and gender-based violence in conflict, the protection of children, the situation of detainees and the need for accountability are some of the issues to which we pay the greatest attention.

Today I would like to devote my statement to attacks against medical personnel and facilities as well as those that target schools and other educational institutions. In both cases they affect two pillars of any society: health and education.

A little more than two years ago, five non-permanent members of the Security Council came together with one objective: to put an end to attacks against the sick and the wounded, medical personnel providing assistance to them and medical facilities in armed conflict. As we have reiterated on other occasions, my country is satisfied with the unique nature of resolution 2286 (2016) because of its scope, the role it grants to civil society and the procedure followed in its drafting and negotiation. The fact that it was sponsored by 84 Member States also reflects the high degree of support for its objectives.

However, two years after its adoption, we cannot be equally satisfied with the degree of compliance with the resolution. I believe, however, that more and more of us are raising our voices when an attack occurs to demand that a prompt, impartial and exhaustive investigation be carried out, as stated in the recommendations of the Secretary-General issued a few months after the adoption of the resolution.

On April 24 and 25, Spain organized the first annual retreat on international humanitarian law for the members of the Security Council in order to create a forum in which the various areas of action of this normative body could be debated. This year's retreat was devoted to the protection of medical assistance in conflict. The goal was for the various options for enhancing respect for international humanitarian law and resolution 2286 (2016), which I mentioned earlier, to be debated among representatives of humanitarian organizations, academia and the United Nations system.

During the debate, it became clear that in order to achieve long-term results, a firm commitment on the part of all States Members of the United Nations was necessary. This translates into possible revisions of our national laws and military doctrines, as well as the inclusion of the protection of medical assistance in conflict in our bilateral contacts. The road map already exists, with the Health Care in Danger initiative of the International Committee of the Red Cross. In addition, my country is prepared to recall during its contacts the potential of existing non-judicial fact-finding mechanisms, in particular the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission.

We wonder, however, what more we can do from a multilateral perspective. International humanitarian law and resolution 2286 (2016) make it clear that certain behaviours are prohibited, but we cannot ignore the fact that these norms are not being complied with. We wonder also how we can generate the political will necessary to achieve a behavioural change in the various parties to a conflict, and how we can increase the political or reputational cost to those responsible for these attacks. We wonder also if the United Nations should not take on a more prominent role in those cases in which none of the existing fact-finding systems can be activated, now that we have initiatives such as the

World Health Organization's Surveillance System of Attacks on Health Care.

Spain wishes to explore, together with the other four co-penholders of resolution 2286 (2016), which options could allow for a greater degree of compliance. We believe that the General Assembly can play a role in this respect.

Spain's concern also extends specifically to the protection of education in armed conflict. As in the health sector, it is not only the present but also the future of any society that is at stake. Today, on the third anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration, we know that attacks against students, schools and universities and their staff have increased in recent years.

We in Spain have just announced our intention to host the third Safe Schools Conference, in 2019. We will work to ensure that the Declaration is endorsed by more Member States, and that, with the help of all, it is made more operational.

I would conclude by stating that the protection of civilians is not about positioning oneself on the side of one or the other; it is about being on the side of civilians, who need medical assistance, education and, more generally, protection. Let us translate our words into concrete action. We cannot afford the cost of inaction.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to the Polish presidency for having organized this debate. I would also like to thank the briefers for their input into today's debate.

I align myself with the statement to be delivered later by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

It is most unfortunate that civilians still account for the vast majority of casualties in armed conflicts. As the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/462) indicates, civilian populations continue to bear the brunt of armed conflicts across the globe. The report shows that at least 26,000 civilians were killed in 2017 as a result of armed conflicts in only six countries, namely, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Yemen.

The report paints a very bleak picture of the current state of the protection of civilians in armed conflict and respect for the rules of international humanitarian law and human rights law. According to the report, attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, medical workers, facilities and humanitarian convoys have increased since the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016). Those attacks are taking place in various places around the world, but they are more prevalent in the Middle East. We condemn all the attacks that have taken place against civilians, including medical and humanitarian staff throughout the world, especially in Palestine, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria and Myanmar.

The new round of repression and the massacre of unarmed Palestinian civilians in Gaza, including women and children, is the latest in an old pattern followed by the Israeli regime over the past seven decades. On 14 May, the world and the Council witnessed the Israeli army commit yet another war crime in Gaza, killing more than 60 unarmed Palestinian civilians and injuring thousands more in a single day. Given the circumstances, there is no doubt that those vicious attacks and killings were planned and deliberate. Those criminal acts took place with total impunity being extended to the Israeli regime by the United States, the same country that later tried to prevent the appointment of a commission of inquiry in the Human Rights Council.

The account of Canadian physician Tarek Loubani is very telling, as he recounts:

> "On 14 May, while treating patients with gunshot wounds in Gaza during the Great March of Return, I was shot in both legs by Israeli forces. One medic on my team, Musa Abuhassanin, was killed while attempting to providing care to Palestinian protesters".

That happened with medical staff wearing high-visibility jackets. When they approached injured Palestinians, they did so with their hands raised so as to show soldiers that they were unarmed medical professionals.

More than three years of Saudi-led aggression against an already impoverished Yemen has claimed thousands of civilian lives, in particular those ofwomen and children, and brought about the destruction of Yemen's civilian infrastructure — including hospitals, schools, roads, food factories and power plants — thereby depriving civilians of their most basic necessities. Blocking humanitarian access to an already famine-stricken Yemen has led to further deterioration in the humanitarian nightmare in Yemen and led to the most catastrophic humanitarian situation the world has seen for many decades. That aggression continues under the watch of the Security Council. Worse still, this inhumane war enjoys the full military, logistical and training support of the United States.

We are living in a world with a growing sense of frustration with regard to dealing with the suffering of civilians in conflict. No one is winning wars. For the sake of the millions of civilians who are suffering around the world, the international community urgently needs to end current conflicts and to prevent new ones from erupting.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Skinner-Kleé Arenales (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to congratulate your delegation, Mr. President, for organizing this open debate on a critical topic, particularly for the Security Council. We welcome the concept note (S/2018/444, annex) prepared by your delegation. We also thank the Secretary-General, the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Yves Daccord, and Ms. Hanaa Edwar for their informative briefings.

Protecting human life and the safety of all civilians is at the heart of any Security Council mandate. However, while there are many relevant resolutions of the Council, especially under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, with a strong international legal basis, a significant part of civilian populations in armed conflicts continue to be innocent victims. We have often witnessed flagrant and deliberate attacks targeting civilian targets, as well as the indiscriminate use of explosive devices, and even chemical weapons, in clear violation of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.

Although many Council decisions have been taken on the basis of resolutions 1265 (1999) and 2286 (2016), to which the Ambassador of Spain referred, the reality is that there is a need to develop national and international regulatory frameworks that clearly govern the foundations and institutional responsibilities for the protection of civilians, which will promote respect for the law and, most important, put an end to impunity for such atrocious and despicable actions.

With regard to peacekeeping operations, Guatemala reiterates that it is essential for the Council to bear in mind that its primary and exclusive responsibility is to forge peacekeeping operations with realistic and succinct mandates whose key objective is the effective defence of civilian populations. Unfortunately, the reality on the ground tells another story. Some mandates are not adapted to the specific context of the mission in question, while others do not match the challenges of the situation. Often mandates are not in line with operational challenges on the ground, or are insufficiently supported by political, financial and, especially, human resources.

With regard to the civilian protection mandate in the framework of peacekeeping operations, my delegation regrets that, within the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, Member States have not been able to reach a minimum consensus to define what is meant by protecting civilians. We look forward to the new policy proposal being prepared by the Secretariat for the effective protection of civilians, to be presented in September, with the understanding that it will include the input and opinions of the entire membership, including troop-contributing countries.

We also reiterate the important contribution of peacekeeping operations to the comprehensive strategy for sustaining peace. Promoting the protection of civilians in armed conflicts in the context of such operations has a direct impact in the implementation of the sustaining peace agenda on the ground.

Finally, my delegation welcomes the recommendation in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/462) regarding the most effective way to protect civilians, which is through prevention. The preventive approach is a priority that we fully share with the Secretary-General because it is coherent and based on respect for international law and full observance of human rights, which in turn will result in better performance by peacekeeping operations. In that regard, we must be aware that, by defending and prioritizing the protection of civilians in armed conflict, we are sending not only a message of hope but also a clear signal of the firm commitment of the political will of the Council. The best way for the Council to act is through shared decisions that prioritize the responsibility to protect civilian populations. Otherwise, this principal organ of the United Nations will not only be prevented from fulfilling its fundamental mission but will continue to be criticized worldwide for its contumacious behaviour.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Slovakia.

Mr. Mlynár (Slovakia): At the outset, allow me to thank the Polish presidency and to express my appreciation for the initiative to convene this important open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and on the context of the global state of the protection of civilians. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and for his recent report on the issue (S/2018/462), as well as the other briefers who enriched the debate earlier today.

While fully aligning ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union, I would like to offer a few additional remarks.

Today's open debate on this topic is not only of the utmost importance but, unfortunately, is very timely as well. Every day we bear witness to an unprecedented downgrading of the value of civilian life and human dignity. The Council has an important role to play — including in this particular context, which can hardly be overemphasized. Attacks on civilians, as well as on civilian infrastructure — whether targeted or accidental — seem to be a common part of warfare.

The inability or unwillingness of States to protect their own civilians — their own people — is a major failure of their primary responsibility. That happens even though we have made considerable progress in the legislative framework, as its implementation somehow falters. Therefore, we need to do more to achieve tangible progress on the ground and, in that regard, I would like to mention three particular areas of focus.

First, we the Member States must reaffirm our commitment to the values and principles of international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. We have to respect and uphold it and we have to claim and ensure our key role to protect our people. It goes without saying that violators of these norms are to be held accountable, whether by national authorities that have the primary responsibility for their prosecution or within the international justice framework. We believe that achieving the universal jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court would be the first step.

Secondly, the role of the security sector in the protection of civilians is also substantial, and Slovakia is a long-standing supporter of the issue of security sector reform and governance. A failure of the security sector often results in security threats and violations against civilians, as well as human rights abuses. Security-sector institutions, if well-developed and representative of the diversity of the population, can address specific needs of various groups within the population and thereby play a crucial role in prevention as well. I would like to place special emphasis on the word "prevention" here, which is closely linked to the issue of the protection of civilians.

Thirdly, there is an urgent need to unconditionally protect the safety and security of humanitarian aid, whether we are speaking in terms of personnel or infrastructure. According to the World Health Organization, 322 attacks targeted health care in conflict areas in 2017, with the majority of those being intentional. The fatal impacts of those attacks are multiplied by the use of explosive and chemical weapons, often in densely populated areas. The implementation of the framework set out in resolution 2286 (2016) and the relevant recommendations of the Secretary-General is imperative in that regard.

Next year we will celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Security Council's engagement with the protection of civilians through the specific landmark resolution 1265 (1999). It will be a good opportunity to look back and reflect on the positive developments that have been made, but also to redouble our efforts towards the full and universal implementation of recommendations put forward in numerous reports of the Secretary-General and raised during today's open debate.

We cannot, so to speak, gamble with the principles of humanity: our action when protecting civilians must be decisive and resolute at both the national and international levels.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mrs. Van Vlierberge (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union, as well as those to be made by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict and by the representative of Qatar on behalf the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect.

I would like to thank you, Sir, for organizing this debate. I would also like to thank the briefers for their excellent presentations, which underscored the gravity of the situation.

A year ago, the Secretary-General had already highlighted the need to strengthen respect for international humanitarian law, the rules of which are increasingly being flouted. In his latest report (S/2018/462), he again rightly insists on that point and provides new recommendations. It is in that spirit that today Belgium would like to present some concrete measures and suggestions that contribute to the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

First of all, it must be remembered that the primary responsibility lies with States. In Belgium, an interministerial commission for humanitarian law was established in 1987 to monitor the implementation of international humanitarian law. We also have the means to ensure perpetrators are held accountable, including by establishing universal jurisdiction where permitted by a sufficient connecting factor.

In addition to States, non-State armed groups must also be made aware of the need to respect international humanitarian law. Belgium commends the outstanding work of Geneva Call in that regard, the results of which are encouraging, as emphasized by the Secretary-General in his report. However, our efforts would not be complete if they did not were simultaneously applied at the international level.

Belgium actively supports and participates in the intergovernmental process of strengthening respect for international humanitarian law, facilitated by Switzerland and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The work of promoting and protecting international humanitarian law carried out by the ICRC is more indispensable now than ever before against a backdrop of flagrant erosion of these rules. It is for that reason that my country has, for several years, provided more than €20 million of financial support a year.

When States are unable to cope or are clearly lacking in their obligation to protect their civilians, action undertaken by the international community becomes paramount. The protection of civilians is therefore at the heart of the mandates of the vast majority of United Nations peacekeeping operations. In the majority of cases, that mandate is implemented; however, under some circumstances the protection of civilians has not been ensured, with devastating human consequences. It is on those cases that we must concentrate in order to prevent their reoccurring.

Belgium believes that training is a cornerstone of the prevention of such atrocities. We therefore decided to invest in the training of contingents by supporting the first French-language training in the protection of civilians, to take place in a few weeks' time in Entebbe. We are providing a specialized trainer and have translated the course materials into French so that they are accessible to more troop-contributing countries.

Like others, Belgium has made a commitment to protect civilians through the Kigali Principles. We welcome the broad adherence to the Principles by troop-contributing countries. That is a positive development. We encourage more countries to join the movement, as well as to commit to concretely implementing the Principles on the ground.

The protection of civilians is also an element that must be taken into account in mediation efforts to resolve conflicts. At a seminar at the United Nations in February, chaired by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Didier Reynders, it emerged that there were sometimes difficulties in converging the respective objectives of political mediation and humanitarian negotiation. All too often, the actors involved in each of those processes operate as though in a vacuum. Strategic thinking is therefore necessary in order to make the best choices while taking those two dimensions into account.

In the face of increasing violations of international humanitarian law and the fight against impunity — a source of new conflicts in itself — we also call on the Security Council to strengthen its support for national judicial proceedings and hybrid mechanisms. States that have not yet done so should also ratify the most recent version of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in order to ensure that the perpetrators of atrocity crimes can no longer find refuge and thereby escape accountability.

Finally, I would like to conclude by recalling the obligations incumbent on all of us pursuant to resolution 2286 (2016), adopted two years ago by the Council, the principles of which remain more pertinent than ever. In that regard, Belgium is pleased to announce that it is adhering to the principles set out in the political declaration proposed by France on 31 October to take concrete measures to strengthen the protection of medical personnel in conflict zones.

The President: I now give the floor to the Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Ms. Adamson: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, the Secretary-General and the representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross for their speeches.

The protection of civilians remains of the utmost concern for the EU and its member States, and we welcome this opportunity to speak today. We also welcome the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/462), along with the practical recommendations contained therein.

One does not need to look to official documents or reports to be made aware that we are facing a protection crisis. Every day, news reports remind us that civilians — including women, children and persons with disabilities — disproportionately suffer the consequences of conflict and instability. Schools and hospitals are regularly attacked, with negative effects also on the fulfilment of the right to education and the possibility for children to pursue a better future. That was a worrying trend throughout 2017, which unfortunately has continued in the first months of 2018.

I would like to address four areas that are of particular concern to us and where the EU and its member States have taken steps to advance protection efforts: respect for international law; preventing gender-based violence; reducing restrictions on humanitarian access and protection of medical and humanitarian personnel.

Only a few days ago, the Security Council, together with numerous Member States, reaffirmed its commitment to upholding and respecting international law (see S/PV.8262). Notwithstanding that, civilian populations continue to bear the brunt of armed conflicts across the globe — whether it be as victims of deliberate or indiscriminate attacks, such as those suffering from the reverberating and long-term effects of urban warfare or those forcibly displaced from their homes.

It is our collective responsibility to ensure respect for international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, and to hold those who violate it accountable. It needs to be said openly that civilian victims of unimaginable atrocities need elementary satisfaction of the sense of justice. We are morally obliged to bring perpetrators of crimes to justice, especially those who commit the most flagrant violations of international law.

Within the EU, there has been an increasing number of prosecutions under national legislation against those who breach the norms of international humanitarian law. The EU maintains strong support for international justice and accountability, including the work of the International Criminal Court, and urges all States members of the United Nations to do the same. Let us bridge the gap between what is being said in the Council and everyday practice.

Secondly, as noted in the Secretary-General's report, sexual and gender-based violence continues to be employed as a tactic of war, terrorism, torture and repression. It is a common and alarming trend across various and otherwise diverse crises. The victims — women and girls, men and boys — are often those already belonging to the most vulnerable groups.

It is therefore absolutely imperative that a gender perspective be incorporated in protection efforts, including humanitarian action. To that end, the EU and its member States remain committed to, among other initiatives, the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies. We encourage partners to urgently implement their commitments.

Thirdly, the year 2017 served as a sombre reminder of the crucial link between the protection of civilians and humanitarian access — and more often the lack thereof. Widespread and persistent constraints on the delivery of humanitarian aid prevented millions of civilians across the world from meeting their most basic needs. The EU condemns, in the strongest terms, the use of siege and starvation tactics as a method of war. Politics have no role to play in the delivery of life-saving assistance. The EU also opposes bureaucratic impediments, including delays in permits or visas, that challenge effective humanitarian action.

Lastly, mindful of States' legitimate security concerns, we oppose the criminalization of principled humanitarian activities under the pretext of countering terrorism. Therefore, under the March 2017 European

Union directive on combating terrorism, the provision of humanitarian assistance by impartial humanitarian organizations recognized under international law does not fall within the scope of that directive.

Fourthly, and related to my last point, the EU remains concerned about the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, including those providing of medical services in conflict. As facilitator of the General Assembly resolution on this topic (General Assembly resolution 72/131), we work tirelessly to strengthen the protection of those who risk their lives on a daily basis to help others, including national staff. We are also fully committed to the continued implementation of resolution 2286 (2016), adopted by the Council two years ago, and urge other States to join us in this effort. Principled humanitarian action, including the provision of medical services to the wounded and the sick, defines our humanity and must remain an undisputed priority.

Finally, peacekeeping missions can play a pivotal role by having the protection of civilians at the core of their mandates, in line with the Kigali Principles. In that regard, we must seek a better definition of possible political strategies for the protection of civilians that can help to improve implementation on the field, as well as in the framework of the reform of the peace and security architecture envisaged by the Secretary-General and its focus on prevention.

In addition, Member States should strive to improve the gender balance in all components of peacekeeping operations in order to achieve more equitable gender representation and to improve the capacity of missions in reaching all segments of the civilian population.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): I wish to thank the Polish presidency of the Security Council for organizing this briefing, as well as the briefers, namely, Secretary-General António Guterres; Mr. Yves Daccord, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross; and Ms. Hanaa Edwar, as civil-society representative.

Italy aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union and with those to be delivered by the representative of Switzerland, on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, and by the representative of Qatar, on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect, which we co-chair. We wish to add the following remarks in our national capacity.

Civilians suffer enormous consequences from armed conflicts and insecurity in a wide array of circumstances, including targeted attacks, indirect consequences of internal conflicts and urban warfare, mass displacement and the use of starvation as a method of war. For those reasons, we strongly believe that the protection of civilians — in particular women, children and persons with disabilities — must be at the core of the agenda of the United Nations system and of all its activities. We also believe that the protection of civilians is a fundamental duty and obligation that each Member State and the international community as a whole must entirely fulfil.

Essential preconditions to ensure the protection of civilians must comply fully in all circumstances with the cardinal principles of international humanitarian law, in particular the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, human rights law and refugee law. In that regard, a strong link between accountability and prevention must be achieved.

On the one hand, serious violations of international humanitarian law and of the relevant Security Council resolutions must be thoroughly investigated and perpetrators brought to justice, including, where applicable, through referrals to the International Criminal Court or other international tribunals. On the other hand, early-warning and early-action mechanisms for prevention are instrumental in raising awareness and adopting an atrocity-prevention lens in possible conflict situations. We fully support the long-term holistic approach to the protection of civilians outlined by the Secretary-General in his latest report (S/2018/462), which consists of addressing the root causes of conflicts, advocating for respect of international humanitarian law, including by non-State armed groups, and ensuring full accountability.

In that context, we recall the landmark resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of humanitarian and health-care facilities and personnel. Two years after its consensual adoption, we still need to see its urgent and full implementation, as attacks on hospitals and humanitarian convoys continue unabated. We urge not only that health-care facilities and personnel not be targeted in the context of conflicts, but also that safe and unimpeded humanitarian passage be guaranteed to

There is a continuing trend of the urbanization of conflicts, with an acute impact on civilians and civilian objects, due to the indiscriminate use of weapons in densely populated areas. Children are often the ones to suffer the most devastating effects from conflicts, and that is why unlawful attacks directed against schools must be condemned in the strongest terms, while taking note in that regard of the Safe Schools Declaration. The starvation of the civilian population and its besiegement are increasingly being used as methods of warfare. On this last issue, we welcome the ongoing discussions in the context of the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court regarding a proposal to amend the current legal accountability framework.

Recognizing the heavy civilian toll of today's conflicts should not be to the detriment of highlighting progress and identifying avenues for action. Let us learn from the benefits of compliance with the norms and principles of humankind and from positive examples. Let us be ambitious with regard to protection. It is within that context that the Group of Friends would like to stress the following five priorities.

First, enhancing respect for international humanitarian law is absolutely crucial. We are all called upon to ensure respect for international humanitarian law through the Geneva Conventions relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts. Armed conflicts are regulated by specific rules, which include those governing the conduct of hostilities, providing for humanitarian access and protecting the wounded and sick, including the provision of medical care to the enemy. In view of widespread violations, we call on the Council and Member States to uphold their responsibilities in that regard, notably by supporting the Geneva-based intergovernmental process on strengthening respect for international humanitarian law.

Secondly, accountability for violations of international humanitarian law is of paramount importance to demonstrate to actual or potential perpetrators that violations do not go unpunished and, equally important, to deliver justice to victims. We welcome national-level investigations and prosecutions. In line with the principle of complementarity, when such national systems are unable or unwilling to act, accountability should be ensured through existing international investigative and judicial mechanisms. We call on all States to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and fully cooperate with the Court.

Thirdly, the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of health care in armed conflict, must remain a priority. In that regard, we welcome recent initiatives by Member States and organizations dedicated to mobilizing political leadership, encouraging the exchange of good practice and fostering implementation at all levels, in particular the establishment in Geneva of an informal group of support to the resolution.

Fourthly, United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions play a vital role in supporting the transition from conflict to peace in some of the most fragile regions in the world, and we would like to thank all of those who contribute to such endeavours, especially troop- and police-contributing countries. The destabilizing effects of such conflicts, particularly the violence and displacement that they produce, often leave civilian populations vulnerable to human rights violations and abuses. Peacekeeping missions contribute to reducing that threat, and protection-of-civilians activities, including those carried out by the civilian component of missions, are rightly at the heart of their objectives, taking note of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians.

The protection of civilians is a core obligation of the United Nations, but expectations and capability must converge. We therefore encourage more focused debates in all bodies responsible for peacekeeping operations, and we welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General to mobilize all partners and stakeholders in support of more effective United Nations peacekeeping, including through his Action for Peacekeeping initiative.

Fifthly, and finally, there is a need to dedicate greater attention to the protection of civilians in counter-terrorism contexts. Counter-terrorism measures taken by States must always comply with international humanitarian law, human rights law and international refugee law. We call on States to ensure that counter-terrorism legislation and measures do not impede humanitarian and medical activities or engagement with all relevant actors, as foreseen by international humanitarian law. We also call on the Council and other relevant parties to consistently uphold those principles and consider ways of strengthening protection in counter-terrorism contexts.

Today's armed conflicts are, first and foremost, protection crises. Prevention must remain a priority. We must follow those avenues for action and build on the initiatives and practical measures highlighted in the Secretary-General's report. More must be done to promote the development of national policy frameworks on the protection of civilians, engage with non-State armed groups to enhance the protection of civilians, facilitate exchanges on good practice and ensure compliance with the relevant provisions of international law and accountability for their violation. The Group of Friends is committed to doing its part and contributing to global-level advocacy to enhance the protection of civilians in armed conflicts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council and on your capable steering of the work of the Council. I thank you, Sir, for convening this open debate to discuss the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We appreciate the importance that the Polish presidency attaches to this topic, which was demonstrated by the participation of Poland's Minister for Foreign Affairs during the beginning of today's debate.

In a famous decree, when the caliph of Prophet Mohammed, Caliph Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, sent an army of Muslims in a defensive mission in the seventh century, he gave them rules of guidance that served as a basis for the protection of civilians at all times. He stated:

> "Do not commit treachery or deviate from the right path. You must not mutilate dead bodies. Do not kill a woman, a child or an aged man. Do not cut down fruitful trees. Do not destroy inhabited areas. Do not slaughter any of the enemies' sheep, cows or camels, except for food. Do not burn date palms, nor inundate them. You are likely to pass by people who have devoted their lives to monastic services; leave them alone."

With those eloquent words the caliph of Prophet Mohammed summed up the rules of the protection of civilians. He did not forget those who devoted their lives to worshipping. Those are principles and rules that should be committed to and complied with at any time and in any place.

The bleak reality of today's world is painful; it falls far short of the vision of Caliph Abu Bakr. The protection and integrity of civilians guaranteed by Abrahamic religions and international law are violated without fear of accountability or persecution and with total disregard of humanitarian principles. A few days ago, we witnessed new carnage that was committed by Israeli forces in Gaza, claiming the lives of tens of Palestinian martyrs and wounding thousands.

For seven successive years, the world has witnessed the bloodshed in Syria, claiming the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians through all means of murder and genocide. In Myanmar, the world is watching hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslim civilians being expelled from their homes; their homes are being burnt, their women raped and their children displaced. In Yemen, Iran-supported Houthi gangs are carrying out abhorrent forms of torture and humiliation against civilians, including the recruitment of children, planting mines in residential areas and using civilians as human shields, including a 4-year-old child, Jamila, who was saved by the Arab coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen and handed safely back to her family.

It is high time that the perpetrators of such hostilities against civilians recognize that their crimes will not go unpunished. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has therefore endorsed the establishment of a commission of inquiry for the crimes committed in Gaza, and also supports the establishment of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. We call for the facilitation of the return of the Rohingya Muslims to their homes and for those responsible to be held to account for the harm inflicted upon the Rohingya.

My country, in collaboration with its partners in the Arab coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen, is carrying out a military operation to save the Yemeni people from the obscurantist Powers that wish to control and lead the Yemeni people into subversion. We have exercised the greatest care, caution and restraint in our operations to ensure the efficient and inclusive protection of civilians. Occasional and undeliberate incidents have been given due attention and investigated; in many cases, we held to account those responsible and compensated those affected. The measures taken by the coalition to protect civilians included the following.

them as a critical condition for the effective and timely provision of humanitarian assistance.

Against a backdrop of increasing indiscriminate attacks against civilians, we are particularly alarmed by those affecting children, who suffer the most devastating effects of conflict. Italy condemns, in the strongest possible terms, attacks directed against schools, as well as any military use of schools, while recalling in that regard the Safe Schools Declaration, to which we urge more Member States to subscribe.

In line with our strong commitment to the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies, Italy believes that a gender-oriented approach is key to prevent and respond to emergency situations.

Finally, peacekeeping missions should effectively and proactively implement their protection-of-civilians mandate in line with the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, to which Italy has fully subscribed.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Estonia.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): I thank you, Sir, for convening today's ministerial-level open debate on a very timely and critically important topic.

Estonia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union.

As described extensively in the Secretary-General's annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2018/462), we continue to witness the grim reality of growing numbers of civilians killed in conflicts, as well as ongoing violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law.

Over the years, a number of landmark resolutions have been adopted, such as 1894 (2009), which prioritizes the protection of civilians in the context of the United Nations peacekeeping operations, as well as 2286 (2016), which is dedicated to the protection of medical care in conflict situations. We recognize the progress that has been made, but at the same time emphasize the need to take further steps in fully implementing those and other relevant resolutions. We need full and unimpeded humanitarian access to the people in desperate need of it, and we need to ensure that those helping will be safe as well.

The primary responsibility of States is to ensure the protection of their people. In that regard, I would like to emphasize the paramount importance of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. More needs to be done in addressing the root causes of conflict, finding avenues to promote political dialogue and creating truly inclusive societies. Estonia fully supports the Secretary-General's reform agenda and the concept of sustaining peace, as well as placing prevention and sustaining peace at the core of the work of the United Nations.

Furthermore, in terms of preparing peacekeepers and other United Nations staff to be deployed on missions, education and training in international humanitarian law has an important role in supporting efforts to halt and prevent acts of violence, attacks and threats against the wounded and sick and medical and humanitarian personnel, as well as medical facilities. References to mission-specific legal issues prior to deployment could prove to be valuable and lead to better application of international law, as well as complement the overall troop-training procedure and raise awareness.

For our part, Estonia has ratified the main instruments of international humanitarian law with regard to the protection of civilians and has introduced the necessary domestic regulations for their enforcement. Every measure has been taken to ensure that our military personnel do not violate international law when carrying out their duties and that they are trained to comply with the obligations to protect civilians as agreed in the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians.

Finally, let me emphasize the importance of accountability. Perpetrators must be brought to justice and States must ensure that those responsible do not operate with impunity. In that regard, let me also underline the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in cases where investigations or prosecutions at the national level are not possible. We encourage States to cooperate with the ICC, and the Security Council to refer matters to the ICC. In cases already referred to the ICC, further support from the Council is of paramount importance.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Chile.

Mr. Skoknic (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland for convening and presiding over this important debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We also appreciate the briefings made by the Secretary-General and the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

This debate could not be more timely, as it is taking place at a time when the international community is bearing witness to the suffering of millions of women, children and men trapped in armed conflicts around the world. Chile is strongly committed to the agenda for the protection of civilians in armed conflicts and recognizes the link between the women and peace and security agenda and that of children in armed conflict, which form part of our foreign policy priorities. A clear example of that is the open debate that we organized on this topic during our presidency of the Security Council in 2015 (see S/PV.7374).

The spiral of violence that leads to war, displacement and abuses against vulnerable groups, especially women and girls, is not inevitable. Chile, like the Secretary-General, believes that the best way to protect civilians is to address the root causes of conflicts, promote human rights and the rule of law, strengthen governance and institutions and invest in inclusive and sustainable development.

We must move from delayed reactions to preventive actions. The commitment to conflict prevention also obliges us to deal with illicit and irresponsible arms transfers, which facilitate conflicts and undermine protection and peacebuilding initiatives. In that context, I would like to highlight that only four days ago, on 18 May, we deposited our instrument of ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty as a clear commitment of my country to this matter. Consequently, 95 States have ratified the Treaty.

We fully agree with the priorities set out by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2017/414) of May 2017 and reiterated in his latest report (S/2018/462), of 14 May, regarding the need to bolster respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights standards, promote good practice among the parties to a conflict, protect humanitarian and medical missions, prioritize the protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping operations and prevent forced displacement, while seeking durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize that accountability is a central tenet that ensures that the parties to an armed conflict improve their compliance with international obligations. Of equal importance are justice and reparations for the victims of such crimes.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Lauber (Switzerland): I am pleased to take the floor on behalf of the members of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, namely, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Uruguay and my own country, Switzerland.

The Group of Friends thanks the Polish presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's open debate. We also thank today's briefers for their statements.

It is of paramount importance that the protection of civilians be discussed by the Council on a regular basis to advance full respect for, and the implementation of, the norms related to the protection of civilians, as enshrined in international humanitarian law, human rights law, international refugee law and international criminal law. The protection of civilians is a key aspect of the maintenance of peace and security, and we call on the Council to systematically uphold and include core protection-of-civilian standards in its deliberations and decisions consistently and throughout the Council's agenda.

Doing so is more necessary today than ever. The latest report (S/2018/462) of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians clearly indicates widespread violations of international humanitarian law and worrying trends in a number of areas. Indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian objects, including medical facilities and schools, occur with appalling frequency in many contemporary conflicts. In some cases, the wounded and sick, as well as medical personnel, are intentionally attacked. Detainees are treated inhumanely, impartial humanitarian actors continue to face widespread and persistent humanitarian access constraints and millions of civilians are forced from their homes into a perilous fate where they face heightened protection and assistance needs, countless others are missing, with insufficient attention provided by States to clarify their fate and inform next of kin of their whereabouts.

First, we have worked to identify military targets, which includes a number of phases, starting with selecting, analysing and making sure that the target is a military object by consulting a number of sources in order to guard against mistakes in the targeting mechanism. We assume that any site in Yemen is a civilian site, unless proven otherwise.

Secondly, we continue to assemble a list of prohibited areas and sites that cannot be targeted, including, inter alia, civilian areas, places of worship, diplomatic offices, headquarters of international organizations and non-governmental organizations and archaeological and heritage sites. That list is regularly updated.

Thirdly, coalition forces use guided and pinpoint-accuracy weapons, despite the high cost of such arms, in order to guard against any collateral damage.

Fourthly, we drop warning leaflets in the areas where we plan military targets before targeting those objects, in order to ensure that civilians clear the area.

Fifthly, we follow standard operating procedures, while investigating and evaluating the impact of air strikes.

Sixthly, we established a unit on the protection of children and civilians in our Joint Command, and we enable the technical team of the United Nations to train the members of that unit.

All of that proves that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is committed to the high standards that emanate from the venerable religion of Islam and the decree of Caliph Abu Bakr and relevant international law. We confidently call for those who disregard such rules and do not admit responsibility for their actions, carrying out cold-blooded murder, to be held accountable, be they snipers in Gaza or those using barrel bombs and chemical weapons in Syria. They are supported by parties, particularly members of the Iranian regime, who commit murder through sectarian militias in Lebanon, Syria and other parts of the world. It is regrettable and reprehensible that the Iranian representative speaks about the suffering of civilians in Yemen, given that that country is the primary cause of such suffering.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Panama.

Mr. Arrocha Ruiz (Panama): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the members of the Human Security Network, a cross-regional network composed of Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, Norway, Slovenia, Switzerland, Thailand, South Africa as an observer, and my own country, Panama. The Human Security Network is an informal group of States that promotes the integration of the human security approach into policies and programmes at the regional, national and international levels.

On behalf of the Network members, I would like to express our appreciation to the presidency of Poland for convening this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, as well as to thank today's briefers for their statements and to express our gratitude for the presentation of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/462).

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is one of the priorities of the Network, and we have engaged constructively in Security Council debates on the issue since 2002. We encourage the Security Council to continue advancing the protection agenda and separate this important issue from other political discussions that could undermine the potential of this framework of action. The Human Security Network is of the view that traditional security approaches should be complemented by a people-centred, holistic approach to security. That includes a focus not only on the protection of civilians once a conflict situation occurs, but also conflict prevention in a broader sense.

The Human Security Network welcomes the latest report of the Secretary-General. We observe with growing concern that civilian populations continue to bear the brunt of armed conflict across the globe, in particular when explosive weapons are used in populated areas. In such cases, international humanitarian law is often insufficiently implemented. We appreciate that the Secretary-General's report addresses the issue and we encourage Member States to participate in their respective ongoing talks. We wish to support the Secretary-General in his call for strict compliance with international humanitarian law, including the utmost precaution in the conduct of hostilities in urban settings.

We share the Secretary-General's view that, in the long term, the best way to protect civilians is to address the root causes of conflict, build sustainable peace, promote human rights and the rule of law, strengthen governance and democratic institutions and invest in inclusive and sustainable development. We encourage the Council to use all the information generated by the different organs of the United Nations to better implement the international norms and obligations for the protection of civilians.

We welcome the continued calls for accountability for violations of international humanitarian law, which is vital for the protection of civilians and achieving sustainable peace. Accountability is a key element in the protection of civilians. States must comply with their obligations under international law to hold accountable perpetrators of crimes committed against civilians. As the international community, we should do more to build national capacities to ensure accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights.

We value the continued attention that the Security Council is giving to this important issue, and we further call on the Security Council to strongly, systematically, consistently and promptly respond to all violations of international law in situations of armed conflict. Neither silence, nor tolerance nor impunity are an option. That is a message that should clearly emanate from the Security Council and one that must resonate with us all.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Archbishop Auza: The Holy See would like to thank the Polish presidency for organizing today's important and very welcome debate.

The Fourth Geneva Convention puts the protection of civilians at the heart of international humanitarian law. The 1977 Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions significantly improve the legal protection covering civilians and the wounded. Yet, despite those safeguards, one can safely affirm that it has never been as perilous to be a civilian in the middle of armed conflict as it is today. Sadly, the Security Council must listen regularly to testimonies of the most brutal, barbarous and premeditated instances of the targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure as a tactic of war.

Taking into account the atrocities and all the attacks deliberately targeting innocent civilians in many parts of the world, the Secretary-General rightly speaks of a global protection crisis. The current level of preventable suffering is indeed horrifying and, as Pope Francis has repeatedly stated, it is utterly unacceptable that so many unarmed persons, including many children, have to pay the price of conflict.

Essential health services, including hospitals and the work of medical personnel, play a critical role as providers of vital life support and sustainers of hope and trust during conflicts. Any attack on hospitals, schools and staff deprives entire generations of their right to life, health and education, as Pope Francis has noted. The spate of recent attacks on medical facilities in conflict situations by both State and non-State actors must be condemned in the strongest terms possible. They are not only an egregious breach of international law, but also a betrayal of humankind itself. The culture of impunity for such crimes must end.

The Security Council's landmark resolution 2286 (2016) speaks to that imperative by unequivocally condemning attacks or threats against medical and humanitarian personnel who are exclusively engaged in medical duties. The task we have now is to translate that political resolve into tangible action.

The growing trend of attacks on humanitarian workers is also a cause of very grave concern. The politicization and militarization of humanitarian aid, moreover, is unacceptable. Any party to a conflict must be held accountable for any act of denying civilians access to food, water or basic medical care in order to gain military advantage. Similarly, the use of humanitarian access as a bargaining chip in peace negotiations must be rejected.

Above all, the goal of protecting civilians is best served by preventing the outbreak of armed conflict in the first place. That entails addressing the root causes of conflict, finding inclusive political solutions to disputes and seeking peaceful settlements. A culture of prevention is, after all, the best assurance that we have for sustainable and enduring peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belarus.

Mr. Rybakov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank the Polish presidency for organizing what is a very timely open debate given the truly disastrous current international situation in various regions of the world. We are being forced to discuss the issue thanks to a lack of action on the part of States themselves, and first among them the members of the Security Council, in preventing international conflicts, in which civilian populations are the primary victims.

The Security Council is the key and the sole organ within the United Nations system with the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. Today, unfortunately, it has become a forum for geopolitical confrontation where genuine conflict resolution is sacrificed to the promotion of individual States' interests.

Dozens of Palestinians, including children, died in clashes on the border between Gaza and Israel last week, and hundreds of people were injured. We have still not received convincing evidence of the use of chemical weapons in Douma, and yet declarations that have been made about that here in the Security Council have been used to justify acts of criminal military aggression against Syria. To use an expression that has become commonplace in this Chamber, it is highly likely that we are dealing with open provocation in that regard. In a different time, a similar excuse was used to start a war against Iraq.

As a result of shelling, people continue to die in south-eastern Ukraine. To date, four years after the brutal incineration of more than 40 people during clashes outside the Trade Union House in Odessa, that crime has gone unpunished. The suffering of civilians, especially the most vulnerable groups, during armed conflict is a direct consequence of States' unwillingness or inability to sacrifice their political ambitions for the sake of preventing and resolving conflicts.

I would also like to draw the Council's attention to a vulnerable group of professionals who are always on the scene in danger zones — translators and interpreters. In extremely high-risk situations of armed conflict and post-conflict peacebuilding, translators and interpreters are in serious danger, since their professional work means that they have to help establish a dialogue between parties to conflicts and with civilian populations. In our view, it is long past time to formulate an international instrument, whether in the form of an international treaty or a Security Council or General Assembly resolution, that would affirm the special status of translators and interpreters in dangerous situations and improve their protection.

In conclusion, I would like to note that the Republic of Belarus has never avoided international efforts to maintain peace and security, especially in a regional context. Belarus continues to consistently support a peaceful settlement of the conflict in south-eastern Ukraine, contributing to it by holding in Minsk the meetings of the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine and its subsidiary working groups, including the subsidiary group on security. We also support establishing mutually acceptable parameters for the possible deployment of United Nations peacekeepers to the region that would satisfy all the parties, without exception. I want to assure the Council that Belarus stands ready to continue to work comprehensively to promote the peaceful settlement of this situation, including at the regional level.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Rwanda.

Mrs. Rugwabiza (Rwanda): I would like to thank the Polish presidency for convening today's debate on recommitting us to the central responsibility of all peacekeeping missions, the protection of civilians. I also thank Secretary-General António Guterres, Mr. Yves Daccord, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Hanaa Edwar for their briefings.

The protection of civilians is best served, first, by preventing conflicts and their escalation; secondly, by resolving conflicts through political means when prevention has failed; thirdly, by ensuring accountability for those responsible for crimes against civilians during armed conflicts; and fourthly and most importantly, by putting people and the protection of civilians at the centre of United Nations political and peacekeeping action. Today's debate underscores the pivotal importance of the protection of civilians, especially as civilians continue to account for an ever-growing percentage of victims in armed conflicts. Rwanda strongly condemns all attacks on civilians caught in situations of armed conflict. Civilians are never casualties of war; they are always victims of war crimes, either because they are deliberately targeted or because they are used as human shields by parties to conflicts.

Rwanda underscores that the protection of civilians should be prioritized in all United Nations peace operations in order to effectively prevent and respond to violations of international law in situations of armed conflict. In that regard, I would like to highlight four points on how the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians address the political commitment to protecting civilians and improving the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping operations, given the circumstances that are defining today's challenges.

First, the Kigali Principles are a set of best practices aimed at strengthening the protection of civilians in United Nations-mandated peacekeeping missions. They are based on lessons learned and represent a concrete blueprint aimed at shaping the practices of peacekeepers in accordance with their mandate, including in volatile situations. Over the past decade, the international community has vastly increased the demands it places on peacekeepers and has often asked them to do more with much less in ever more challenging environments. A 2014 report of the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (A/68/787) found that in 507 attacks reported on civilians between 2010 and 2013, peacekeepers almost never used force to protect those under attack. The report made three recommendations: first, enhancing operational control over contingents; secondly, improving the clarity of peacekeepers' tasks at the tactical level; and thirdly, improving the working-level relationship between peacekeeping operations and humanitarian entities. The Kigali Principles directly address the second recommendation, and I would like to take this opportunity to commend the peacekeepers who are effectively implementing them on the ground.

Secondly, I want to emphasize that the Kigali Principles do not supersede the Charter of the United Nations, nor do they contradict the principles of United Nations peacekeeping or go beyond a mission's mandate. After all, all United Nations peacekeeping missions' mandates are decided by the Security Council.

Thirdly, the Kigali Principles do not exclude the use of force. As stated in paragraph 3 of the Kigali Principles, we agree

> "to be prepared to use force to protect civilians, as necessary and consistent with the mandate. Such action encompasses making a show of force as a deterrent; interpositioning our forces between armed actors and civilians; and taking direct military action against armed actors with clear hostile intent to harm civilians."

Fourthly, the Kigali Principles were born of a desire to improve our understanding and implementation of the protection of civilians. We have sometimes been the target of criticism and questions about their origin. I would like to say that the origin of the Kigali Principles is very clear. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland visited Rwanda last month. The origin of the Principles dates back to 1994, when we Rwandans were left to fend for ourselves. We learned from our tragic history and have since worked relentlessly to make our humble contribution to the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping with respect to fulfilling the noble and sacred duty of deterring violence against civilians and protecting civilians in situations of armed conflict.

Lastly, enhancing the protection of civilians in armed conflict requires a paradigm shift from conflict management to prevention. States bear, and will continue to bear, the primary responsibility to protect civilians. However, when warring parties specifically target civilians and that protection is not provided, it is our collective responsibility as States Members of the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, to ensure that the protection of non-armed civilians, internally displaced persons, United Nations agencies and humanitarian actors who live and work in complex and deadly environments remains a priority task for United Nations peacekeepers when present on the ground. That is our collective responsibility as United Nations Members and will continue to inform Rwanda's commitment to peacekeeping, both in the African Union and at the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Ham Sang Wook (Republic of Korea): I would like to first commend the Polish presidency's timely initiative to convene today's open debate on the critical issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The war in Syria has now entered its eighth bloody year. To date, more than 500,000 people have lost their lives, including a disproportionate number of civilians. And, tragically, I am afraid that Syria is just one of the many countries where civilians are being killed in armed conflicts.

At the same time, forced displacement of civilians in armed conflict is at its highest levels in decades, with the number of refugees and internally displaced people — over 65.6 million — now higher than ever since the Second World War. Armed conflict also disproportionately affects vulnerable groups, such as women and children, and compounds their suffering. Even worse, sexual violence continues to be employed as a tactic of war and terrorism against those populations. Under that grim backdrop, the Republic of Korea supports today's timely initiative to draw renewed attention to the essential issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We would like to stress the following three points.

First, to protect civilians from conflicts, we need to focus on prevention. As the Secretary-General has highlighted, prevention is the paradigm-shifting approach that closes the gap between commitment and reality. That supports the direction commonly underscored by the reviews on peace operations, the peacebuilding architecture and the women and peace and security agenda. In that sense, I urge the Secretary-General to employ his powers under Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations to bring imminent or unfolding large-scale attacks on civilians to the attention of the Security Council. I urge the Council to respond in unity to such calls from the Secretary-General to save lives.

Secondly, we must ensure accountability for the crimes being carried out against civilians in clear violation of international law. Impunity must be made unacceptable in each and every corner of the world. Indeed, it is imperative that violators be held accountable for their crimes through prosecution in national and international criminal justice systems, including the International Criminal Court. Even in cases where justice systems are not yet available, we need to collectively prepare for the emergence of justice and accountability in future. In that regard, the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic serves as a good example.

Thirdly, we must make the most of existing United Nations peacekeeping missions to enhance the effectiveness of efforts to protect civilians on the ground. In resolution 1894 (2009), the Security Council stressed that mandated protection activities must be given priority in the use of available capacity and resources. However, we must also acknowledge that United Nations peacekeeping missions cannot fulfil that mandate in the face of the growing number and complexity of challenges unless they are supported by appropriately strengthened capacities. As such, we should continue to explore ways to qualitatively enhance such capacities by ensuring that peacekeeping missions are better equipped with essential technologies, such as unmanned aerial vehicles, Global Positioning System equipment and other advancements, to facilitate civilian protection.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to reaffirm the Republic of Korea's commitment to working with other Member States with a view to protecting vulnerable people from suffering in armed conflicts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, my delegation welcomes the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, Mr. Jacek Czaputowicz. We thank him for his excellent stewardship of the Security Council's work within the framework of today's very constructive debate. We wish the Polish delegation every success in its presidency of the Council this month. We would also like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his very important briefing today. Furthermore, we thank the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Yves Daccord, for the important role that the Committee plays in delivering humanitarian assistance to various regions, in particular areas that are made difficult to access by the danger caused by the presence of terrorist groups. Finally, we would also like to thank to Ms. Hanaa Edwar, a renowned human rights advocate who has been particularly active in my country, the new democratic Iraq.

Our armed forces have achieved major successes in the liberation of territories that were under the control of terrorist entities. Our forces — and I would go so far as to say our heroes — have demonstrated great professionalism by behaving in line with international humanitarian law and in respect for human rights. Those efforts have been welcomed by the entire world and are the pride of Iraq.

Immense efforts have been made to combat terrorism. In that regard, we have received welcome support and assistance from the international community as well as from friendly and brotherly countries. They have created humanitarian corridors for civilians to ensure they are able to leave the most dangerous areas formerly under the control of terrorist groups. Safe camps have also been created for displaced persons where basic services, including food, medical care and financial assistance, are provided.

The Government of Iraq has mobilized all ministries and all the means and resources at its disposal in order to deliver humanitarian assistance, medical care and drinking water to our citizens in liberated areas in the Nineveh, Al-Anbar and Salahadin governorates. We have been supporting those people by all means possible. Psychological rehabilitation programmes have been successfully conducted for the benefit of the population so that they can be reintegrated into society and national reconciliation achieved, following the destruction of infrastructure and homes in various regions by terrorists who have fled.

The Iraqi Government is committed to cooperating with the United Nations so as to implement resolution 2379 (2017). We have therefore worked to criminalize the terrorist organization Da'esh. We cooperate with the United Nations to provide needed assistance to victims and punish those responsible, who must not enjoy impunity. Accordingly, Iraq signed a joint communiqué on 23 September 2016 with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, which entered into force at the beginning of this year, thereby enabling us to provide assistance to victims of sexual violence linked to terrorist activities. We have also worked to strengthen the capacities of the various Iraqi institutions that provide support and assistance to victims. The Prime Minister of Iraq also signed a work plan with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, which is aimed at rehabilitating children abused by Da'esh.

Moreover, in a letter from High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, on 20 June 2017, the European Union condemned the crimes committed by Da'esh in Iraq and qualified them as war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of genocide. Iraq gladly welcomed the training provided to its security forces, who are in daily contact with civilians. That training is provided by United Nations specialized experts, in line with the memorundum addressed to the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict on 16 May 2017. Through its national legislation and international commitments, the Iraqi Government is working to hold accountable the terrorist organization Da'esh, which has committed numerous crimes, including murder, kidnapping and human trafficking, all of which must not go unpunished. We are therefore coordinating our efforts with those of the international community to that end, not only at the national, but also at the international, level.

We have established specialized courts responsible for investigating crimes committed by terrorists, in particular crimes of genocide and crimes committed by Da'esh against minorities in Mosul. We have also conducted investigations into crimes perpetrated against prison inmates in Badoush prison. The Iraqi Government has also established a high-level monitoring and reporting interministerial commission responsible for protecting the rights of children within the framework of human rights violations during armed conflict, the establishment of which was approved by the Prime Minister on 23 November 2017. Currently, the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs is responsible for monitoring human rights violations concerning children who have been deprived of their most basic rights owing to armed conflict. We have also established a central commission to compensate victims affected by military operations and terrorist attacks under Law No. 57/2015 to mitigate the suffering of citizens caused by military activities.

We have also set up a common coordination centre so as to coordinate our work related to managing crises linked to recent military and civilian activities in order to provide protection to civilians and guarantee the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those who are in need. The Iraqi armed forces are working under our Commander-in-Chief, who has given explicit orders to protect civilians in the various regions in which we have had to confront terrorists. We have worked to protect infrastructure, which has cost us some time in terms of military operations. We did not want to move forward too quickly so that we would not put the infrastructure in jeopardy and also to protect civilian lives. We have provided all the necessary information to the air and ground forces so as to carefully target various objectives without putting civilians in harm's way. Our security forces have also worked professionally to restore the various civilian organizations that had been used by Da'esh and sites that were used to train terrorists and stockpile weapons. We therefore worked to liberate civilians who had been used by Da'esh as human shields. We have liberated territories, and today we are working to rehabilitate the various sites and regions.

Our victory at the military level was followed by another victory at the civilian level. Through legislative elections, we have enshrined the principle of peaceful succession to power by holding parliamentary elections on 12 May, which strengthened the unity of Iraq. All Iraqis worked as one to defend their humanity and their very existence. The entire world stood with Iraq to end terrorism and extremism in my country, which must never again return to any part of Iraq. We want to rebuild our human capital and reassure a dignified return to our displaced persons and refugees.

Lastly, we thank the international community and the United Nations for their work in the areas of the protection of civilians and the responsibility to provide support to Iraq against terrorism.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Suárez Moreno (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to take the floor on behalf of the 120 States members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM).

First of all, on behalf of the States members of the Movement, we convey our respect to His Excellency Mr. Jacek Czaputowicz, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, and, at the same time, express our appreciation to his delegation for convening this open debate. We also thank the Secretary-General and the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross their invaluable briefings.

We live in a world today that faces multiple and complex emerging threats and challenges to international peace and security, some of which are the result of war or protracted conflicts. In the context of armed conflicts, we have seen how the suffering of innocent civilians, in particular the most vulnerable, caught up in the middle of armed conflicts, can be further worsened by deliberate, indiscriminate and, in some cases, systematic attacks, in clear violation of the norms of international humanitarian law.

During the Movement's eighteenth Mid-term Ministerial Conference, held in April in Baku, the Ministers stressed that the protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of the host country, while recognizing that such a task is also mandated in a number of United Nations peacekeeping operations, to which they reaffirmed their commitment.

As stated in the concept note (S/2018/444, annex) for this open debate, the protection of civilians is one of the core issues on the agenda of the Security Council, as a result of the significant challenges faced by civilians in conflict-affected countries, which range from threats or attacks against them to forced displacement, food insecurity or the need for humanitarian assistance. For that reason, this organ must ensure, among other things, that the norms of international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, are upheld and respected at all times, particularly in the context of armed conflict.

NAM takes this opportunity to call upon all parties to armed conflict to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, including the principles of taking precautions in attacks, proportionality and distinction, by, inter alia, prohibiting the targeting of civilian populations, civilian property and certain special property during an armed conflict and obliging parties to any conflict to ensure overall protection against the dangers arising from military operations for civilian facilities, hospitals, means of transportation and relief materials, and distributing such relief materials.

Moreover, the member States of the Movement stress the fact that humanitarian agencies and their personnel must respect international humanitarian law and the laws of the countries in which they carry out their work, as well as the Guiding Principles of Humanitarian Assistance, as set forth in the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182, among which figure humanity, neutrality and impartiality. Furthermore, they must uphold the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of the host countries and respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity, national unity and independence of States.

The States members of the Movement would like to recall that 88 per cent of peacekeeping personnel deployed in the field come from NAM countries and are carrying out mandates focused on the protection of civilians. As we have always emphasized, the fulfilment of the mandates, among other things, depends upon effective tripartite coordination among the troop- and police-contributing countries, the Security Council and the Secretariat. In any case, the protection of civilians can be ensured only if peacekeepers are fully enabled to operate under the highest moral standards at all times. In that regard, the importance of every measure needed to ensure their safety and security cannot be overemphasized.

In conclusion, the 120 NAM member States categorically condemn all acts of violence, attacks and threats against civilian populations, which in certain instances may amount to war crimes, and deplore their medium- and long-term consequences. They also stress the importance of ensuring that those responsible are held accountable before the law, in order to break any cycle of impunity and send a clear and united message of zero tolerance for such despicable acts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Romania.

Mr. Jinga (Romania): I would like to commend the Polish presidency for convening this open debate on the protection of civilians, a topic that lies at the heart of the Security Council's mandate.

Romania aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union. I will now make a few remarks in my national capacity.

Next year will mark the twentieth anniversary of the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Since then, the Council has adopted multiple resolutions on that topic, enacted a legal framework for strengthening that protection and mandated peacekeepers to integrate the protection of civilians into their missions.

However, the recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/462) on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts describes an accurate but sombre reality. We witness, on a regular basis, attacks on schools and hospitals, widespread and persistent humanitarian access constraints and appalling behaviour, such as sexual violence, which continues to be employed as a tactic of war. Major gaps remain with regard to prevention, protection and impunity. At the same time, we are confronted with new challenges, such as the urbanization of conflict, asymmetrical threats that include unpredictable attacks targeting peacekeepers, and the blurring of differences between combatants and innocent civilians. As the nature and characteristics of conflict are evolving, so must our reaction. Bearing all those realities in mind, allow me to highlight three points.

First, preventing armed conflict should continue to be at the heart of international cooperation. In strengthening the protection of civilians, it is necessary to start by addressing the root causes of conflict. Advancing political dialogue, pursuing reconciliation processes and strengthening security sectors, economic recovery and social development are therefore comprehensive means for creating an environment of sustainable peace.

Secondly, when prevention fails and we confront the reality of armed conflict, ensuring respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law is of paramount importance. In fact, it is our sole guarantor in ensuring that, even in the face of war, human dignity is still upheld and parties may still find ways to coexist once hostilities have ended. There is already a consistent legal architecture in place; we should continue to build on it. Romania is among the States that endorsed the Safe School Declaration, the Kigali Principles and resolution 2286 (2016), concerning the protection of the wounded and sick and of medical and humanitarian personnel engaged in medical duties. In doing so, we reasserted our engagement in support of the United Nations efforts for peace and security in countries affected by conflict and recognized the essential importance of the human dimension of protection. We also reaffirm that the main responsibility in the protection of civilians lies with the host countries. We consequently invite all States that have not yet done so to become parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and we call upon all Member States to fully cooperate with the Court.

Thirdly, we strongly support the Secretary-General's proposal on developing national policy frameworks on the protection of civilians. In 2007, the Romanian Government adopted a national strategy for the implementation of international humanitarian law, which has a dedicated section on the protection of civilians. The strategy is designed to be implemented both at the domestic level and during participation in international missions. It aims to promote and raise awareness about the rules of international humanitarian law among armed forces personnel and other entities with responsibilities in that field.

Romania has been contributing with troops to peacekeeping operations since 1991. Currently, we are participating in two thirds of all United Nations missions on the ground. So far, we have provided more than 12,500 military, police and close-protection personnel to United Nations missions, and we will continue to do so. Romanian contingents attend a rigorous three-month predeployment training programme, in which the protection of civilians and respect for human rights are cornerstone themes.

Finally, the Romanian experience proved to be beneficial in that it incorporated a gender dimension, where female members of peacekeeping operations interacted with women and vulnerable individuals from local communities. With a long-term commitment to peace, justice and development, Romania will continue to advocate and act for the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, in close collaboration with all relevant actors.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Kickert (Austria): At the outset, I would like to thank Poland for convening today's open debate on the protection of civilians. We also congratulate Poland on its initiative to present a coordinated calendar of events on the sidelines of the debate.

Austria fully aligns itself with the statements delivered, or to be delivered, on behalf of the European Union, the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians and the Human Security Network. In our national capacity, we would like to highlight four additional points we deem to be particularly important.

First, I would like to emphasize the importance of the single most effective and sustainable tool for the protection of civilians, namely, prevention. Even when all parties fully respect international humanitarian law in a conflict, civilians will continue to suffer. We therefore need to invest more in conflict prevention. Therefore, we call on the Security Council to strengthen the prevention agenda, including the importance or recognizing human rights violations as the early warning signs of conflict. Whenever conflicts break out, full compliance with international humanitarian law is paramount. Austria continues to be a strong supporter of the intergovernmental discussions in Geneva on strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law.

My second point relates to the dramatic non-compliance with international humanitarian law we witness in many conflicts. As the Secretary-General points out in his report,

> "[w]hen explosive weapons were used in populated areas, 92 per cent of the casualties were civilians." (*S/2018/462, para. 41*)

I repeat — 92 per cent. We therefore call on all States to participate in the development of a political declaration to address the humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Nineteen of our African colleagues have shown us the way by adopting the Maputo communiqué. Let us follow their lead. We also share the Secretary-General's call to improve and extend civilian-casualty tracking, reporting and response in order to be able to reduce civilian harm. Austria is co-organizing side events on those two topics tomorrow and Thursday.

My third point relates to one of the consequences of conflicts, namely, forced displacement. We continue to witness increasing numbers of displaced persons. This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Let us use that anniversary to strengthen our work towards durable solutions in line with the Guiding Principles. The development of a multi-stakeholder plan of action for advancing prevention, protection and solutions for internally displaced people covering the period 2018-2020 is an excellent first step in that regard.

Lastly, the protection of civilians is now a central task of many United Nations peacekeeping missions. Those missions have become increasingly dangerous and multidimensional. We must ensure that peacekeepers receive adequate training and the necessary equipment to fulfil their protection-of-civilians mandate. With that aim, Austria will continue to offer a United Nations-certified course to create better awareness of the protection of civilians on the operational level.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, which consists of 50 Member States and the European Union and is co-chaired this year by Italy and the State of Qatar.

The Group would like to thank Poland for organizing today's important open debate. I would also like to extend our gratitude to Secretary-General António Guterres; the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Mr. Yves Daccord; and the Secretary-General of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association, Ms. Hanaa Edwar, for their highly informative briefings.

Today we bear witness to a continuing and pervasive degradation of respect for civilian lives and an appalling disregard for the norms and laws that the international community established to alleviate the effects of armed conflict. The results are tremendous human suffering and a high risk of mass atrocity crimes. Although all States have a responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing, more than 65 million people are currently displaced as a result of conflict, atrocities and persecution worldwide. The commission of systematic, flagrant and widespread violations of applicable international humanitarian law and human rights law in situations of armed conflict may constitute a threat to international peace and security. It is within that context that the Group of Friends would like to stress the following points.

First, full and effective compliance with international law is fundamental to the protection of civilians. Many civilian deaths, as well as suffering and displacement, could be avoided if all parties to conflicts respected international humanitarian law and human rights law.

Secondly, it is of the utmost importance that States put in place appropriate legislative and institutional arrangements to comprehensively address violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights and hold those who commit such violations and abuses accountable. Accountability for serious violations of the law of armed conflict and human rights violations and abuses not only helps provide justice for victims, but also deters future violations and abuses.

States have the primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute crimes committed within their jurisdiction. National accountability efforts should be encouraged and supported, including through the strengthening of judicial cooperation among States. International investigative and judicial mechanisms, including fact-finding missions, commissions of inquiry, international courts and hybrid tribunals, including the International Criminal Court in circumstances that are properly within its jurisdiction, provide complementary avenues to enable accountability when and where national options prove insufficient.

Thirdly, we are witnessing widespread attacks directed against civilian infrastructure, such as health-care facilities and schools. Let us not forget that deliberate or indiscriminate attacks against medical facilities and civilian infrastructure, such as schools, as well as on the civilian population, including humanitarian workers, may amount to war crimes.

There has been a pattern in recent years of attacks on schools, students, teachers and other education personnel by State security forces or non-State armed groups. The United Nations was able to verify 753 attacks on schools and hospitals in 2016. From May 2016 to date, the ICRC has recorded more than 1,200 incidents of violence against health-care facilities or personnel in just 16 countries. Approximately one incident of violence against health-care facilities or personnel has taken place every single week since the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), with regard to the protection of medical and humanitarian personnel and facilities.

Fourthly, the protection of civilians should be sensitive to gender considerations. Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security note that armed conflict and emergencies have a differential impact on women, girls, men and boys. Women's needs must be considered and addressed. The Group urges the United Nations and other relevant actors to ensure that affected populations, including women, are involved in the development of protection-of-civilians strategies and activities.

Lastly, journalists play an important role in bringing attention to conflict situations and in mobilizing action in situations where atrocity crimes are committed. Independent reporting can put pressure on political actors to find solutions to conflicts and can contribute to promoting accountability. According to Reporters without Borders, more than 1,000 professional journalists were killed in the past 15 years, an average of two deaths per week, while more than 24 have already been killed in 2018. Member States should create and maintain a safe and enabling environment for journalists reporting in conflict situations.

Far too many civilians are killed, in both direct and indiscriminate attacks, in today's complex and protracted conflicts. The international community should make every effort to assist civilians caught up in conflicts. The members of the Security Council should take timely and decisive action aimed at ending and preventing atrocities, and not hinder credible efforts to that end.

Finally, the surest way to protect civilian populations is by investing in the prevention of conflicts and the peaceful settlement of disputes, based on the principles of justice and international law.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ghana.

Mrs. Pobee (Ghana): My delegation joins others in thanking the Polish presidency for convening today's all-important open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. A word of appreciation also goes to Secretary-General António Guterres, the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Yves Daccord, and the civil society representative, Ms. Hanaa Edwar, for their highly informative briefings.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, just delivered by the Permanent Representative of Qatar.

The protection of civilians in times of conflict is at the core of the work of the United Nations. Today's open debate provides an opportunity for Member States to consider concrete measures to deal with the continued flagrant disregard for international humanitarian law by some States and non-State armed groups in their deliberate targeting of civilians in conflict situations.

It is a disturbing fact that more than 65 million people worldwide are currently displaced as a result of conflicts, atrocities and persecution. In the past year alone we have witnessed tens of thousands being killed or maimed and millions forced to flee their homes as a direct result of conflict. The United Nations is seemingly unable to protect populations from horrifying reported instances of mass atrocity crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated in various parts of the world, with women and children bearing the brunt of such crimes. This alarming trend should be of concern to the international community and cannot be allowed to go unchecked. We must do more to enhance respect for international humanitarian law and safeguard the lives of civilians caught up in far too many conflicts across the globe.

Ghana condemns the use of starvation as a method of war and the use of civilians as human shields. Other reprehensible acts, such as obstructing medical care and destroying facilities and infrastructure essential for human survival, and such acts of terror as indiscriminate shelling or bombardment of cities, must be condemned by the international community. We need be reminded that those acts amount to war crimes under customary international law and a number of international treaties, including the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. States in armed conflict must observe protocols governing the conduct of war and, in line with their primary responsibility to protect their citizens in times of armed conflict, must abide by norms of international humanitarian and human rights law in order to minimize civilian death, suffering and displacement.

It is also the responsibility of States to investigate and prosecute crimes committed within their jurisdiction and to bring to justice perpetrators of atrocity crimes and crimes against humanity. My delegation therefore wishes to urge Member States to incorporate international law into their domestic law by enacting appropriate national legislation and putting in place appropriate institutional frameworks to comprehensively address violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law and hold perpetrators accountable.

Ghana supports the view that the international community should make use of all the tools at its disposal to uphold its collective responsibility to protect civilians where national Governments are unable or unwilling to do so. We wish to reiterate the point made on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect that international investigative and judicial mechanisms, including fact-finding missions, commissions of inquiry and the International Criminal Court (ICC), provide complementary avenues to enable accountability when and where national options prove insufficient.

Accountability is key and should be enforced if we are to make progress in this matter. In that regard, Ghana commends the ICC for its work in bringing perpetrators to justice. Considering the workload of the Court and the several cases that need to be investigated and addressed, we are of the view that serious consideration must be given to the effective implementation of the principle of complementarity as a core principle of the Roman Statute of the International Criminal Court and a tool in trying crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court. My delegation calls for capacity-building at the national level to equip domestic court systems with the required skills and knowledge and enable them to take ownership of some of those trials. Certainly, the independence of national courts should be paramount in their capacity-building efforts.

Cooperation at the regional and subregional levels as a means of sharing best practices and ensuring adherence to international law in respect of human rights will assist in those efforts. It is gratifying to note that, in the West Africa region, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has made significant strides in strengthening regional integration and the maintenance of peace and security by adhering to internationally acceptable standards in its peacekeeping and regional security mandates. That subregional collaboration also includes the training of defence and security personnel in basic principles of international humanitarian law, with emphasis on the protection of civilians and international human rights law, which have been incorporated into the training and operations of the ECOWAS Standby Force.

Ghana has endorsed the Kigali Principles, which provide a blueprint for strengthening the international community's resolve to effectively protect civilians during armed conflict. The Principles provide practical measures that emphasize training and preparedness for peacekeepers, vigilance in monitoring and reporting human rights abuses and signs of impending violence, avoidance of delays in protecting civilians, and other steps to enhance the implementation of civilian-protection mandates. We commend Member States that have endorsed the Principles and urge them to duly operationalize them in international peacekeeping.

In conclusion, we wish to call on the Security Council to re-examine peacekeeping mandates and operational procedures to ensure that they are matched with the requisite resources that contribute to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We must ultimately invest in conflict prevention and the peaceful settlement of disputes. We must promote respect for international law and justice for all. We must act collectively and decisively to end and prevent atrocities. The protection of civilians in armed conflict is our urgent duty and responsibility as States Members of the United Nations, and we must live up to the letter and spirit of the Charter.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ireland.

Mr. Tierney (Ireland) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Madam President, for convening today's important debate.

We align ourselves with the statements delivered earlier on behalf of the European Union and the Human Security Network.

(*spoke in English*)

The facts revealed in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/462) are stark. Over the past 12 months, tens of thousands of civilians were killed or injured and millions were forced to flee their homes as a direct result of armed conflict. Last year, the United Nations recorded the death or injury of more than 26,000 civilians by deliberate or otherwise indiscriminate attacks in just six countries. Furthermore, the report highlights that more than 50 million people are impacted by conflict in urban warfare today.

International humanitarian law, in particular the principles of distinction, discrimination and proportionality, and the obligation to take precautions in attacks, must be adhered to by all States engaged in armed conflict. Of particular concern is the use of explosive weapons having area-wide effects in urban areas. The use of such weapons, which strike both military objectives and civilians and civilian objects without distinction, have long-term negative humanitarian impacts that far outlast the conflicts in which they are used. Beyond the immediate injuries and deaths caused, the destruction of crucial infrastructure, housing, schools, hospitals and water and sanitation systems means that civilian populations suffer long after the conflict has ended.

More than 32,000 civilians were recorded killed or injured in 2016 by explosive weapons, with Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan and Turkey having the highest numbers of civilian deaths and injuries. In total, incidents of explosive violence took place in 70 countries. Explosive weapons also have specific impacts on women due to damage to homes and the societal disarray in the aftermath of bombing and shelling.

We need a renewed political commitment to the protection of civilians. We require enhanced compliance through more effective operationalization of the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law into military doctrine and practice. Protection and access to humanitarian assistance must be ensured for those affected by crisis, including women, children, persons with injuries, persons with disabilities and the most vulnerable. We welcome the continued calls for accountability for violations of international humanitarian law, which is vital to the protection of civilians and to achieving sustainable peace.

(*spoke in French*)

Peacekeeping is an essential tool for the protection of civilians. Ireland supports the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians and believes that the Principles can and must underpin the work of peacekeeping operations on the protection of civilians. As a major troop-contributing country, Ireland strongly supports the notion that peace operations be provided with the necessary means to fulfil their mandates, including the protection of civilians.

(*spoke in English*)

Training and leadership are also key. Ireland has put at the disposal of United Nations partners a range of courses that will meet a variety of identified training needs. Ireland will also ensure that the Irish personnel deployed on overseas peacekeeping missions operate to the highest standards in accordance with international humanitarian law and human rights law and that our peacekeepers seek to ensure the security and protection of civilians in accordance with their mission mandates and rules of engagement.

We have also adopted a whole-of-government approach to the institutionalization of the United Nations voluntary compact on the elimination of sexual exploitation and abuse. Much has been done on that appalling issue at the level of the United Nations. However, it is important to consistently reiterate that it is impossible to have credibility in discussing the protection of civilians if civilians are suffering abuse at the hands of their supposed protectors.

As my colleague from the Human Security Network so eloquently said earlier, we also share the Secretary-General's view that, in the long term, the best way to protect civilians is to address the root causes of conflicts, that is, to build sustainable peace, to promote human rights and the rule of law, to strengthen governance and democratic institutions and to invest in inclusive and sustainable development.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Muhammad Bande (Nigeria): I thank the presidency of Poland for organizing this important debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Our appreciation also goes to the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, and the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Yves Daccord, for sharing their perspectives on this very important subject.

Nigeria aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

It is indeed a matter of grave concern that conflict situations expose civilians to killing, kidnapping, torture, sexual exploitation, trafficking and other dangers. That is particularly so when non-State armed groups are involved. Their complete disregard for international law and international humanitarian law serves to underscore the challenge that they pose to the protection of civilians in conflict situations.

It is also an unfortunate reality that women and girls are the most affected in conflict situations. They face sexual violence, sexual enslavement, trafficking and other forms of exploitation and degradation. In that regard, we acknowedge the Security Council's commitment to the protection of women and girls in both conflict and post-conflict situations, as exemplified by the adoption of resolutions 1325 (2000), 1960 (2010) and 2122 (2013), among others. We believe that those resolutions provide suitable frameworks for the Security Council to enhance the protection of women and girls in both conflict and post-conflict situations.

We strongly support community engagement in promoting the protection of civilians. Community-alert networks and community liaison assistants are vital to understanding threat perceptions at the community level, including how communities seek to reduce risks and how peace operations can address them. We would like to see the international community recognize those imperatives.

As Member States are aware, the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria has led to a humanitarian crisis in north-eastern Nigeria. It is to be noted that, of the estimated 14.8 million people affected by the insurgency, of which 1.7 million people are internally displaced, the most adversely affected are women and children. In response to that situation, the Government of Nigeria has taken decisive steps to ameliorate the plight of civilians, particularly women and girls, living in rural areas. A robust social protection initiative and a second national action plan to fully implement the provisions of resolution 1325 (2000) have been instituted by the Government to protect civilians, particularly women and children, from the ravages of conflict.

Nigeria was also among the first group of States to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration in Oslo, thereby making a pledge to protect schools during armed conflicts by, inter alia, using and promoting the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. The Declaration complements and strengthens Nigeria's national Safe Schools initiative, established in 2014 as part of the response by the Federal Government to promote safe zones for learning.

Such initiatives reflect the Government's commitment to ensuring the security of women and children during armed conflicts and to enhancing their active and direct participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. To that end, the initiatives also complement the implementation of the Buhari Plan, which provides a blueprint for comprehensive humanitarian relief and socioeconomic stabilization of the north-eastern part of country, as well as for the return and resettlement of displaced persons.

We are collaborating with our neighbours — Chad, Cameroon, the Niger and Benin — within the framework of the Multinational Joint Task Force in order to defeat the Boko Haram insurgency, which targets civilians, particularly women and children. It is heartening to note that more than 1,000 kidnapped women and children have been rescued and that all the territories once controlled by the group have been recovered. Indeed, our experience in the Lake Chad region today is evidence that, with determined international collaboration, terrorism can be defeated.

In addition, the Government of Nigeria adopted a multinational and multi-agency approach, named Operation Safe Corridor, in order to effectively handle the deradicalization, rehabilitation and reintegration back into society of Boko Haram members who have voluntarily surrendered. So far, many insurgents have willingly surrendered to the military, while approximately 700 others have indicated an interest in doing so. We have also taken steps to cater to victims of Boko Haram terrorism — whether they are victims in terms of rape, sexual violence or other violations — by providing humanitarian relief and financial, economic, educational and psychosocial support.

Despite the tremendous efforts being made at the national level, we acknowledge that protecting civilians in conflict situations remains a critical challenge not only for the United Nations but also for the entire international community. We therefore call for continued collaboration and assistance among the international community to address the issue. On that note, we pay tribute to our security forces, peacekeepers, humanitarian workers, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders for their hard work, often in difficult circumstances, to ensure the safety and the security of civilians.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): At the outset, I thank the Polish presidency for convening this important and timely debate, which has particular significance for the State of Palestine against the backdrop of the violent repression by Israel, the occupying Power, of peaceful civilian protests in the Gaza Strip over the past few weeks.

For decades, the Palestinian people have appealed to the international community for protection in accordance with the rules and norms enshrined in international law, in particular humanitarian law. For decades now, our people have suffered a protection crisis, compounded by the length and depth of the Israeli military occupation and the impunity enjoyed by Israel, which has emboldened its commission of grave violations of the United Nations Charter, international law and United Nations resolutions.

Only such blatant impunity can explain how Israel dared to open fire from hundreds of metres away on peaceful protesters with live ammunition in a deliberate and wilful manner, killing more than 100 Palestinian civilians, including children, and wounding thousands of civilians in broad daylight.

International law is clear as to the protections to which civilians are entitled. An occupying Power cannot claim the right to security at the expense of the right to the security, protection and well-being of the occupied people, nor can it do so at the expense of a people's right to self-determination.

Equally, there is no right to security that justifies permanent occupation or the illegal acquisition of land by force and its colonization. There is no right to security that justifies a blockade imposed on 2 million people for 11 years. There is no right to security to justify the unlawful use of force, notably the use of lethal force against peaceful protesters. International law draws a clear line between legal action and war crimes and crimes against humanity, and we call upon all States not to accept any justification for the commission of such crimes.

In that connection, the State of Palestine today submitted a referral to the International Criminal Court regarding war crimes, especially the ongoing war crime of settlements.

The international community, including the Council, has made lofty commitments to protect civilians, and the obligations on all are clear. There cannot be one standard for the entire world and another for Israel. Impunity is the greatest threat to civilians, while accountability is the greatest shield protecting them, deterring and preventing the recurrence of crimes.

Are the Palestinian people entitled to protection under the provisions of the United Nations Charter, international humanitarian law and international human rights law? The answer must be yes. Is anyone under the illusion that Israel has any respect for its obligations under these instruments? Has it not demonstrated time and time again its contempt for the rule of law, including the right to life?

There can be no doubt that it is the responsibility of the international community to bring this situation of prolonged, recurrent, widespread and systematic violations to an end. It is also the responsibility of the international community to provide protection to the people under occupation for as long as it persists.

Seeking to uphold this responsibility, Kuwait, in its capacity as the Arab representative in the Council, has in recent days begun consultations on a draft resolution on the protection of Palestinian civilians, following the grave incidents and loss of Palestinian life in Gaza just a week ago at the hands of the Israeli occupying forces. We urge Council members to seize this opportunity to demonstrate that the principles enshrined in Security Council resolutions on the protection of civilians, including children, have no exceptions, and to show their readiness to consistently act in defence of these principles in the face of such grave violations.

We appeal to Council members to uphold their Charter mandate and the Council's credibility and authority, which is being severely undermined. Moreover, we call on all States that believe in the rule of international law to uphold the law in a situation where its breach has been tolerated for too long, prolonging the Israeli occupation and its crimes against our people, prolonging their suffering and the denial of their rights, and preventing the realization of peace. As the Council addresses today the critical issue of the protection of civilians, we call on it to act accordingly and to ensure that Palestine is not the exception.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Thailand.

Mr. Srivihok (Thailand): Thailand aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and that delivered by the representative of Panama on behalf of the Human Security Network.

Let me offer our thanks to Poland for the comprehensive concept note (S/2018/444, annex). We also thank the Secretary-General for his recently released report (S/2018/462) and for his substantive briefing today as well as the valuable insights from the representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Allow me to highlight the elements we believe deserve special emphasis in today's discussion.

First, priority must be given to raising awareness of and respect for the obligations related to the protection of civilians under international law, including under the United Nations Charter. The State has the primary responsibility to protect its citizens, and all parties to armed conflict must honour and strictly comply with their obligations under international law, international humanitarian law and human rights law. All personnel in peacekeeping missions need to understand clearly their protection mandates, priorities and responsibilities.

As an active troop- and police-contributing country, we continue to support the delivery of consistent and coherent training. We firmly believe that intensive predeployment and periodic in-mission training, on both operational tasks and other protection-related elements, is vital. We hold all of our peacekeepers to a high standard of conduct and are pleased to have recently signed the voluntary compact on the elimination of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Secondly, we need stronger partnerships to strengthen the protection of civilians. This requires an integrated approach among military, police and civilian components. They must, in turn, coordinate with national authorities, local communities and the relevant humanitarian organizations in the field. In sum, all stakeholders must exchange information on frank and clear situational assessments that are supported by adequate capabilities and resources and further underpinned by practical and achievable expectations.

Thirdly, it is essential to reduce threats to sustainable peace and development and to build and sustain a protective environment for civilians. We support the Secretary-General's view that the most effective way to protect civilians is through a long-term process and a comprehensive approach applied before, during and after conflict. Sustaining peace requires us to view peacebuilding more holistically as part of the peace continuum from conflict prevention to conflict resolution to laying down the foundations for sustainable peace and development.

Our peacekeepers are trained, as a standard procedure, to assist the local population in their efforts to prevent any relapse into armed conflict and to promote sustainable development. By sharing best practices in agriculture, health care and water-resource management with local villages in Timor-Leste, Haiti and Darfur, our assistance has resonated well with an emphasis on the prevention of backsliding into conflict.

We must also remember the incredible role of women, especially when it comes to building trust and ensuring protective environments. The reach and impact of women within their local communities has long been underestimated. We are proud to say that our current contribution to United Nations peacekeeping operations includes more than 20 per cent female personnel.

Durable peace is not tenable if civilians lack security and are not safe. Let us redouble our investments in practical measures that address that lack of security comprehensively and for the long term.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Bin Momen (Bangladesh): We thank the Polish presidency for organizing this open debate and for the concept note (S/2018/444, annex). We also thank the Secretary-General and the other briefers for highlighting some key areas of concern from conflict situations around the world — from Palestine to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We see merit in efforts to identify good practices in compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law in armed conflicts, as well as in the call upon Member States to develop national policy frameworks on the protection of civilians. We would be willing to explore such initiatives further in the context of our own national international humanitarian law committee.

The latest Rohingya humanitarian crisis has once again revealed to us the total abdication by the authorities of the State concerned of their responsibility to protect civilians irrespective of their status or treatment. For months together, the world witnessed the forced expulsion of a persecuted minority, which the authorities of the State concerned continue to claim as the work of a fringe extremist group. Even if that narrative were to be accepted, it would mean that the State concerned has acknowledged its inability or unwillingness to discharge its responsibility to protect all civilians on its territory.

That is why, during her address during the general debate of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly (see A/72/PV.14), our Prime Minister, The Honourable Sheikh Hasina, urged creating safe zones in Myanmar's Rakhine state to protect civilians under the auspices of the United Nations or the relevant regional partners. In the absence of such safeguards, the forcibly displaced Rohingya in Bangladesh continue to remain in sheer uncertainty about the prospects for their voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return to Rakhine state. To further compound the situation, humanitarian access has remained restricted and the Rohingya who ventured to stay behind have been denied of food supply and medical care. Despite some verbal assurances, there has been no credible investigation or prosecution by the national authorities concerned for the alleged atrocity crimes committed against the Rohingya.

The reason we highlight those issues yet again is not to level criticism against a neighbouring country, but only to reiterate the fundamental yet complex issues that need to be addressed in order to create a situation conducive to the safe and dignified return of the Rohingya and other displaced communities to their homes in Myanmar.

Guided by the unfolding Rohingya crisis, we wish to take this opportunity to stress five points, which have also been made by many other delegations.

First, there needs to be greater emphasis on strategic analysis and assessment by the United Nations and other independent actors on the ground of threats to civilians. The United Nations field management should develop the capabilities to detect early-warning signs and a sense of accountability to report on palpable threats to civilians. The Organization's enhanced role in conflict prevention and sustaining peace can be best exemplified through its evidence-based and unvarnished reporting of facts, including through consultations with the national authorities concerned.

Secondly, safe and unhindered passage for humanitarian personnel and supplies for civilians in need must be ensured by all parties to armed conflicts. Medical facilities, educational institutions, especially schools, and places of worship should be kept out of harm's way in the planning and carrying out of hostilities. Respect for humanitarian assistance and medical care in armed conflict needs to be promoted both during peace and conflict.

Thirdly, Member States have a responsibility to ensure that arms and ammunition transferred to any other national authorities are not used for the commission of atrocity crimes against civilians or other grave breaches of international humanitarian law. Those with influence over State authorities concerned and other conflicting parties should work towards resolving the conflicts instead of further instigating them, while giving primacy to the protection of civilians. There needs to be a shared commitment to avoiding the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas, considering their dire humanitarian impact.

Fourthly, the global norms for ending violence against women and children in armed conflicts need to be translated into action. The Rohingya humanitarian crisis has brought to the fore the issue of children born as a result to sexual violence. There is also a pronounced need to take account for missing persons and detainees, and address trauma among family and community members affected by sexual violence, illegal detentions, enforced disappearances and other human rights violations.

Fifthly, ensuring accountability and justice for serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law is crucial for enhancing their compliance and for shattering a culture of impunity for the commission of atrocity crimes against civilians. The Security Council should make appropriate use of the tools at its disposal to that effect, including through duly considered options for imposing sanctions and referrals to international criminal justice mechanisms.

As a lead troop- and police-contributing country, Bangladesh takes a pragmatic approach to the protection-of-civilians mandate in both practice and preparedness while adhering to the principles of peacekeeping operations. As part of most of the highly challenging United Nations peacekeeping missions, we have seen the relevance of the protection-of-civilians-mandate at first-hand on the ground and, in a number of cases, tackled it with professionalism and some degree of creativity — even when the mandate was not laid out in clear and specific terms. We remain committed to further mainstreaming the protection of civilians into the peacekeeping training programmes designed for our troops and police.

We reiterate, however, that protection-of-civilians mandates need to be backed by viable strategies and adequate resources so that they do not fall through when faced with belligerence from the parties to the conflict or the lack of will or capacity of the host Governments to cooperate. The Security Council has a responsibility to ensure that the protection-of-civilians mandates given to peacekeeping missions are vigorously supported by meaningful political processes to prevent conflicts and sustain peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): Indonesia thanks the Polish presidency for convening this open debate on a highly important topic. We also thank the Secretary-General, the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the representative of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association for their briefings.

Indonesia strongly believes that the protection of civilians in armed conflict should always be one of the core aims of the Security Council. We support the Council's attention on safeguarding innocent people in conflicts. Yet it is deeply disturbing that attacks against civilians have increased in recent years — especially in 2017 — as well as attacks on peacekeepers, which hinder them in discharging their duty to save human lives.

Furthermore, attacks against humanitarian workers, medical missions and civilian assets have reached an unprecedented level. In a number of cases, State authorities have been unable to prevent, counter or investigate them properly. A lack of capacity is one important factor behind that. Everyone needs to be reminded of the clear obligation under international humanitarian law to differentiate between civilian populations and combatants. Everything must be done to avoid attacks on civilians, civilian objects and medical personnel, along with their facilities. Allow me to share some additional points pertaining to our topic today.

First, since the protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of each Member State, capacity-building by States and related support by the United Nations and other partners are vital. The promotion of a culture of peace with a rights-based approach and requisite laws during peace time are therefore very important. Lessons learned and best practices should be shared. We share the Secretary-General's view on the need for all Member States to develop national policy frameworks on the protection of civilians. There should be clear institutional authorities and responsibilities for safeguarding civilians.

Secondly, considering the very serious challenge of non-compliance by non-State actors, who are active in most conflicts today, the Security Council should explore innovative ways to secure their respect for global norms against harming civilians.

Thirdly, there needs to be improvement in medical care to respond to emergency situations. United Nations peacekeeping missions in several conflict areas have experienced challenges in responding consistently to medical emergencies and in evacuating casualties. We stress the need to ensure the swift and safe passage of injured, wounded or sick peacekeepers along with medical and humanitarian personnel who are engaged exclusively in medical duties.

Fourthly, Indonesia underlines the increasingly important role of women in peace processes as well as the protection of civilians. Regrettably, women and children suffer the most in conflicts. Women understand what is needed to create and deepen peace in communities. There should be more system-wide action to help empower women's roles in societies, including as an indispensable force for peacebuilding, protecting civilians and sustaining peace.

While reiterating the fundamental role of Member States in protecting civilians in armed conflict, it is critical that, together with United Nations agencies, the Council facilitate measures to strengthen countries' capacities to protect civilians as well as sustain peace.

The imperative to protect civilians must be embedded throughout the peace continuum — from conflict prevention, resolution, mediation and peacekeeping to peacebuilding and long-term development.

I should like to conclude by reiterating the determination enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. Our task through the United Nations is to save and protect civilians wherever they may be from the evils of war.

Indonesia stands ready to play its part in advancing the agenda of protecting civilians in armed conflicts concretely by contributing peacekeepers as well as in shaping and sharing norms. As stated by the Indonesian Foreign Minister on several occasions, our collective efforts in resolving conflicts should always be aimed at ending all forms of violence, restoring security and stability and protecting all persons. Everyone and every country should be engaged in that noble cause. No civilians should be left behind or left unprotected.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Montenegro

Ms. Pejanović-Đurišić (Montenegro): First, let me thank the Polish presidency for organizing this timely and important open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts and for preparing an informative concept note (S/2018/444, annex).

My country fully associates itself with the statement made by the observer European Union. I would, however, like to make some additional remarks.

In the past few months we have been witnessing increasing numbers of civilian casualties and worsening trends when it comes to the protection of civilians. Deliberate targeting, indiscriminate attacks, including sexual and gender-based violence, against civilians and the increasing use of siege and starvation as a method of warfare are just a few examples. When attacks against civilians take place and suffering happens, especially when women and children are involved, people across the world look to the United Nations for reassurance and protection. This always results in further introspection as to what more could be done in terms of prevention and how parties to armed conflict with a military advantage could be expected to respect international humanitarian law.

Montenegro welcomes the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/462), which describes the state of large-scale destruction and suffering affecting millions of children, women and men. It is clear that it is our joint duty to be more decisive to make our commitments real so as to protect civilians in armed conflicts and the refugees who have fled them. We are convinced that there is more that the United Nations can do to prevent conflicts and, when that fails, to end armed conflicts through negotiated and inclusive settlements.

Montenegro supports international efforts to implement resolution 2286 (2016). We call on other Member States to take action on the Secretary-General's recommendations, which will allow for its full implementation. No country can be justified in standing in the way of a resolution designed to allow civilians access to food and medical assistance. All

Member States, not only those that are parties to armed conflict, have a responsibility to take action.

Montenegro remains committed to the joint initiative led by Switzerland and the International Committee of the Red Cross on increasing compliance with international humanitarian law. We underline the importance of strengthening inter-State cooperation and States' cooperation with international jurisdictions to fight impunity. An important role of the Security Council entails ensuring accountability for such violations, including through referrals to the International Criminal Court. Montenegro strongly believes that human rights mechanisms could contribute to preventing atrocities. In that regard, increased engagement between the Security Council and the Human Rights Council is instrumental. We are convinced that the veto must not be used when there is a clear responsibility to protect civilians. Montenegro therefore endorsed the French-Mexican initiative and the code of conduct of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group. We call on all countries to follow suit.

Montenegro continues to promote and build a robust understanding of international humanitarian law within its own institutions. Through a number of projects and initiatives, along with support from United Nations agencies and other international organizations, we are ensuring that the Montenegro army receives training on the fundamental provisions of international law pertaining to the protection of civilians and medical missions. Those who have been on the ground in Afghanistan, Mali, Western Sahara or in other peacekeeping missions already have significant knowledge and experience, and they promote activities aimed at raising awareness about the protection of civilians in armed conflict as well as in peacekeeping, on the basis of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians.

However, protecting civilians is not only the responsibility of peacekeepers and men and women in uniform, but also the primary responsibility of States. Therefore, we should use the authority of the Council to ensure that States deliver on their primary responsibility to prevent conflict and minimize suffering. Civilians, as well as non-governmental organizations and the communities, play an important role. States should regularly engage them in all their activities aimed at protecting civilians.

Protecting civilians from the ravages of conflict is vital to the mission of the Security Council. It remains our main common goal and collective responsibility. Although the challenges we face are huge, we have to take concrete steps in strengthening the role of the protection of civilians in the overall context of maintaining international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Latvia.

Mr. Mažeikks (Latvia): I thank you, Madam President, for organizing this annual debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I also thank the Secretary-General, the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Ms. Edwar, an Iraqi civil-society representative, for their briefings.

Latvia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union.

Innocent civilians, including women and children, often constitute the vast majority of victims; often they are deliberately targeted by parties to armed conflict, illegal armed groups or terrorist organizations. The increased incidence of armed conflict in urban areas has taken a devastating toll on civilian populations and has damaged civilian infrastructure. The use of explosive weapons and, what is more deplorable, the use of chemical weapons, in populated areas, forced displacement, as well as sexual violence, starvation, sieges and the denial of much-needed humanitarian assistance as methods of warfare have become daily news and do not seem as outrageous as they really are.

Latvia is deeply concerned about attacks on humanitarian and health-care facilities and personnel in armed conflict, which continued at a high rate last year. Overall, we are concerned about the growing sense of fatigue when it comes to disregard for humanitarian principles in present-day conflicts. Impunity for widespread violations on the ground must not be tolerated. It cannot be emphasized enough that all State and non-State parties to conflict must respect international law, humanitarian law and human rights law. Innocent civilians should be spared the effects of hostilities, not robbed of their lives, health, future prospects or homes.

We thank the Secretary-General for his recent report (S/2018/462) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which analyses progress in three focus areas. It is clear that much more needs to be done to translate progress at the normative level into more effective country-specific measures to protect civilians. States bear the primary responsibility to protect their populations, including from atrocity crimes.

Promoting the protection of civilians in all United Nations activities is essential, starting with the conflict-prevention agenda. Latvia considers the protection of civilians in armed conflict as an important part of the Security Council agenda. However, greater efforts by the Security Council are needed to address situations of concern, act promptly in order to prevent or stop a conflict and to demand accountability. Existing challenges to the protection of civilians in diverse conflict-affected areas, including Syria, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ukraine, as underscored by the report of the Secretary-General, should be addressed with a sense of urgency. We call on the permanent members of the Security Council to refrain from using the veto in situations of atrocity crimes.

The protection of civilians is an important component of United Nations peacekeeping mandates. Local communities expect United Nations peacekeepers to protect them. However, the effective implementation of protection mandates remains a challenge. Our work to make peacekeeping operations more adaptable and relevant to the current complex challenges must continue. Better planning, equipment, situational awareness and training are essential to improved performance, effective mandate delivery, the protection of civilians and security of peacekeepers. We also recall the importance of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, which Latvia endorsed in 2016.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize the importance of accountability for serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. We are concerned about the overwhelming lack of proper investigation and prosecution of perpetrators. Latvia is of the view that, where national action is lacking, international legal mechanisms can step in to provide justice for victims. We cannot expect future perpetrators to take the United Nations and its Security Council seriously as long as the current perpetrators act with impunity. It is a fundamental legal obligation and in our common interests to promote and ensure the effective protection of civilians.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): Allow me to express my appreciation to Secretary-General Guterres, Mr. Daccord and Ms. Edwar for their thoughtful briefings earlier today.

The Secretary-General rightly pointed out that the most effective way to protect civilians is to prevent and end conflicts. The failure of the Security Council to respond decisively in some key conflict areas of the world has exacted a profound human toll. Therefore, the United Arab Emirates calls today for re-energized unity of purpose within the Security Council and renewed action for the maintenance of international peace and security.

In my own region, with the conflict in Syria now entering its eighth year, we are experiencing at first hand the challenge of multiple armed conflicts, which have severe implications for civilian communities. In many instances, those conflicts have been worsened and prolonged by the Security Council's failure to act.

For too long, the Syrian people have been denied humanitarian assistance, in large part because of the inaction by the Security Council to adopt any resolution on Syria since 2011 and the failure to implement the resolutions that have been adopted. If that were not already intolerable, the Syrian population has also had to endure the horrors of chemical-weapons attacks. The United Arab Emirates calls for the unobstructed delivery of aid to those in need and for accountability for all chemical attacks against civilians, which are in clear violation of international humanitarian law.

If we apply the Secretary-General's prevention-focused view to Palestine, we can conclude that simply ignoring the root causes of conflict will inevitably lead to further bloodshed. The situation in Palestine and Israel's disregard for civilian life and international law endures as the longest-running tragedy of our region. Israel's actions at the Gaza fence over the past month have included attacks on doctors and paramedics, in clear violation of the protections for medical personnel assisting wounded civilians guaranteed under the Fourth Geneva Convention and customary international law. Israel's actions cannot be condoned or ignored by the international community; they cannot become the new norm. We call on Israel to abide by its responsibilities as the occupying

Power to extend basic human rights and protections to Palestinians.

When the United Arab Emirates calls for accountability in Syria or Palestine, it is not only a question of seeking justice; it is also vital in order to prevent such violence in future. Unfortunately, casting doubt on precise facts and figures has proved to be an effective tool for Governments seeking to stymie any attempt to hold them accountable for their actions. The only way to counter that is to create agreed-upon mechanisms to collect data that is beyond dispute, so that the international community can react appropriately and responsibly to major developments.

In that regard, we commend the recent Security Council visit to Myanmar, organized by Kuwait, Peru and the United Kingdom. The visit is an excellent example of the Council taking steps to fulfil its mandate. Nonetheless, we remain gravely concerned by the plight of the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar. We hope to see the Security Council follow through on the outcomes of the visit.

With regard to Yemen, as a member of the Arab coalition supporting legitimacy in that country, we are taking our own responsibility very seriously when it comes to international humanitarian law and protection for civilians. As I outlined previously, there are grave consequences when the Security Council fails to act. But there can be equally damaging consequences when the Security Council fails to follow through on its own resolutions. The failure of the Council to enforce its resolutions pertinent to Yemen is part of the cause of the protracted nature of that conflict.

Nonetheless, we look forward to continuing to cooperate with the United Nations to resolve the conflict perpetrated by the Houthis and their Iranian backers. We have worked closely with the United Nations to ensure that our military doctrines and practices are in line with international best practices and have worked diligently to rectify problems as they have arisen. We will also continue to work closely with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on ensuring the delivery of much-needed humanitarian aid to affected areas. We look forward to working with the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Yemen, Mr. Martin Griffiths, in his efforts to create a road map for sustainable peace.

However, the Houthis in Yemen are a clear example of the problems that non-State actors pose more generally in our region and around the world. More often than not, it is the civilian populations of the States that those groups have infiltrated that suffer the consequences. That moral hazard is magnified when those groups receive State support. Iran's decision to arm various non-State actors with weapons, including ballistic missiles, in order to avoid sovereign accountability for its actions has pushed the entire region towards a profoundly dangerous precipice.

We would therefore call on the Security Council to take creative and bold steps towards countering the threat posed by non-State actors to better address the nature of the challenges we are most likely to face in the twenty-first century. Critically, that must include taking resolute action against the State financiers and supporters of those groups. Such States can no longer be absolved of responsibility when they provide support to non-State actors that then proceed to violate international law. If anything, we believe that States such as Iran that continue to act in this manner must be held to even greater account because of their blatant attempts to violate international law and their continued violations of Security Council resolutions.

In conclusion, there is much more to be done with respect to the protection and welfare of civilians in conflict, especially for the most vulnerable. In addition to the recommendations made by Mr. Daccord and the Secretary-General, the United Arab Emirates emphasizes the importance of mandatory policies within security and aid agencies to mainstream gender, age and disability in identifying unique needs and responses, as well as establishing accountability mechanisms for those policies, to implement them across all pillars of the United Nations and to publicly report those scores. We call on the Security Council to mirror those efforts and implement corresponding policies.

We also call on the Security Council and fellow Member States to join us in our commitment to protect civilians and uphold international law by focusing on prevention and address the root causes of conflict, while recognizing that the world's regional conflicts will require regional solutions and reinvigorating the Security Council to ensure that it both takes action in response to conflicts and follows through on its existing resolutions in order for the Security Council to uphold its mandate to maintain peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kenya.

Ms. Grignon (Kenya): Allow me once again to commend Poland on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of May and on convening this important meeting of equal magnitude to the meeting convened last week on the rule of law (see S/PV.8262). I also wish to express my delegation's sincere gratitude to Secretary-General António Guterres and the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Yves Daccord, for their comprehensive briefings this morning.

Civilians are protected persons under international law, and the parties to a conflict have a legal obligation to protect them from the effects of conflict. However, we continue to witness many civilian casualties, with thousands of survivors becoming refugees and internally displaced persons in conflict zones. The Security Council's continued consideration of this agenda item is a welcome indication of its commitment to protecting civilians, who are the people most at risk during armed conflict.

Despite the various achievements in this field, there still remain considerable challenges: gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse, inadequate mandates, the absence of a common doctrine and resource gaps risk undermining protection-of-civilian efforts.

Gender-based violence continues to be used as a weapon of war, more so in those conflict situations that are characterized by extremism and terrorism. This is not only a human rights issue, but it also contravenes international law. Additionally, sexual exploitation and abuse by some of those entrusted to protect civilians should be condemned by all. We commend the Secretary-General for his zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. As a troop-contributing country, Kenya is committed to the implementation of resolution 2272 (2016), which seeks to hold accountable the troop-contributing countries that fail to credibly deal with allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Mission objectives should be explicit and take into full consideration the fundamental tasks of peacekeepers and the situation on the ground. Any attempt to have peacekeepers carry out tasks that may pose a risk to the credibility of the mission without necessarily contributing to reducing violence against civilians should be avoided. Equally, caveats imposed on peacekeepers and the divergent views on what constitutes the protection of civilians, coupled with lack of a common applicable doctrine, may complicate the efforts to integrate the diverse sets of military, police and civilian actors who are involved. Uniting efforts is vital; the effectiveness of the protection of civilians largely depends on the ability of different actors to work together for the common good of those at risk.

The primary responsibility for the protection of civilians rests with national Governments; the United Nations becomes involved to offer support or when national Governments fail. Each protection-of-civilians situation is unique. Adequate information on situations is therefore critical for success. It is important for mission leaders to conduct assessments to understand the dynamics of the conflict, the civilian threats and vulnerabilities.

The lack of adequate capabilities and resources pose the greatest challenge to the protection of civilians. Peacekeepers have other primary objectives. Therefore, additional tasks related to the protection of civilians, especially when the number of those at risk surges, and the strain exerted on already limited resources can jeopardize the objective of protecting civilians.

My delegation believes that, for mandates to be effectively executed, there is an urgent need to develop a common doctrine on the protection of civilians to guide those mandated to execute the task. Components mandated to protect civilians need to be well trained, better resourced, properly equipped and have the capabilities to enable them to efficiently implement their mandate of protecting civilians in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Mission mandates should be clear, credible and achievable, with specific objectives on the protection of civilians, and allow for any necessary room for manoeuvre, while devoid of unrealistic constraints. United Nations missions need to develop internal early-warning systems with a common understanding of what constitutes threats to civilians. There is a need for information-management systems that ensure that early-warning information is widely shared with those responsible for protecting civilians, to enable them to make a predictive assessment of the situation on the ground. Moreover, credible intelligence-processing systems are necessary to support United Nations missions.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate the importance of cooperation among international and regional stakeholders. The involvement of communities is also critical to the success of protection-of-civilian mandates and should be facilitated.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation takes note of the concept note (S/2018/444, annex) for this debate and of the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/462) entitled "Protection of civilians in armed conflict". We have some comments and reservations regarding certain information and assessments in the report, which we will convey to the Secretariat in an official letter.

The Syrian Arab Republic believes that the protection of civilians has been and remains the primary and most noble purpose that the Governments of the world have pledged to achieve, saving humankind on a large scale, without any exception or differentiation, from the scourges of wars and conflict, while preserving the fundamental rights and dignity of people. The practices and policies of some Governments prove that addressing that noble question is still selective, with double standards adopted. Such Governments abuse the issue of the protection of civilians in a cheap and selfish manner to serve their political agendas, using the topic as a pretext to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries.

The principle of the protection of civilians is genuine only if accompanied by full compliance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the provisions of international law, including respect for sovereignty, sovereign equality and the non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. The protection of civilians has been and remains the primary responsibility of the country concerned, namely, its Government and institutions, as those are the sole authorities mandated to maintain peace and stability in their territories.

Based on that, Syria will continue to cooperate with its allies and friends by fulfilling its duties and the constitutional right of protecting its civilians from armed terrorist groups. Such groups are composed of tens of thousands of foreign terrorist fighters who have arrived in Syria from more than 100 countries. Those are not words plucked from thin air; that information is documented in United Nations committees and working groups' reports related to combating terrorism. We remind the Council, and we will continue to remind the Council, of those facts.

Today Syria is witnessing a dirty terrorist war in which intelligence agencies and Governments have implicated themselves and which they have ignited by creating armed terrorist groups, training and providing their elements with financing and weapons and facilitating the influx of foreign terrorist fighters to Syria. The worst type of deceit is that focused on concealing the truth. However, facts are blown out of proportion when United Nations reports are politicized, lack information and depend on sources that are openly linked to armed groups or supported and financed by the Governments of countries involved in supporting and sponsoring terrorism. In that regard, I wish to touch upon the so-called White Helmets, which are active in areas under the control of the Al-Nusra Front, a group that is classified as a terrorist entity by the Council, and are one of thousands of examples.

The United Nations bodies and working groups that are carrying out activities in the humanitarian field in Syria have documented that those armed terrorist groups have turned medical facilities and schools in all the areas of Syria under their control into military bases and headquarters from which they can launch mortar and missile attacks after they have looted and destroyed their contents, including advanced medical equipment. United Nations working groups have seen the warehouses that were under the control of armed terrorist groups in Aleppo, eastern Ghouta, Homs and other areas with their own eyes, which were filled with thousands of tons of food supplies and other medical equipment and material. Those supplies were monopolized by those groups for their own elements and families, preventing civilians from benefiting from them — those same civilians used as human shields — or sold at inflated prices. However, regrettably, those documented reports, issued by the United Nations, were and remain lost and have never reached the Secretariat.

Some permanent members of the Council use the topic of this debate to practice and exercise their political hypocrisy or as a pretext to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. I would also like to remind the Council that the United Nations mission to assess the situation in Raqqa documented in a recently issued report that the city has been almost completely destroyed by the illegitimate international alliance, including medical facilities, schools and infrastructure.

There is a legal and moral crisis facing international entities that work under the umbrella of the United Nations. Some Governments take no issue with defending the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, the Syrian Golan and parts of Lebanon; they take no issue withconcocting pretexts and explanations for Israeli violations of international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law; and they take no issue with protecting Israel from accountability for cold-bloodedly killing unarmed civilians. The killing of more than 60 innocent Palestinians and injury to more than 3,000 others is proof of the Security Council's failure to provide protection to civilians owing to the position of the United States, which prevents the Council from exercising its mandate for maintaining international peace and security.

The Security Council's open debates on this issue can be consequential and effective only if their objectives constitute a serious attempt to promote safeguards for protecting civilians. However, if these debates are just a means for political polarization and deepening differences, then we would like to stress that the Charter and international law are clear. Those who want to protect civilians must start by addressing the root causes of their suffering, including foreign occupation, the threat or use of military force, the supporting and financing of terrorism and interference in the internal affairs of and destabilization of other countries.

I remind the Council that the founding Members of the United Nations assigned the Governments of Member States with one sacred duty — that of preventing armed conflict, aggression and war. However, some countries with political, military and economic influence use that influence to support and finance terrorism; they contribute to igniting war and conflict all over the world while assuming the role of firefighters and police officers — the corrupt kind .

In conclusion, and in response to the allegations made by the representatives of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in their statements, we wish to stress that those countries are the first that must submit to questioning and be held accountable for the lack of protection of civilians. Oil money will never shield them from accountability. We remind them that the people of Syria will not forget that most of the money that sponsors terrorism in Syria came directly from them or through donations to suspicious charity organizations that work under the guise of religious or humanitarian charity work. I would like to remind the regimes of those two countries that they lack the sufficient morals and religion to speak about the protection of civilians. Historically, the blood of Syrians and Yemenis has been on their hands.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Alyemany (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of May. We thank you, Madam, for convening this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We are particularly invested in this topic, as it directly impacts Yemen, which has suffered the scourge of war due to Houthi militias. I also wish to thank all of our friends at the United Nations who have warmly congratulated us on the twenty-eighth national holiday that is being celebrated today in Yemen.

Yemen underwent one of the richest experiences of the peaceful transition of power within the context of the Arab Spring. The culmination of that transition was to hold presidential elections, under the auspices of the United Nations and the Security Council, and the National Dialogue Conference that tackled all the difficulties experienced by the country. The movement for change in Yemen, launched within the framework of the initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council and its Implementation Mechanism, has become a model for peaceful transition process in Yemen which aims to build a new Yemen — a Yemen that all Yemenis want to become a free and democratic country, putting an end to dictatorship and exclusion. Indeed, dialogue and civilized trends have prevailed with the adoption of our new Constitution, which was the result of the conclusion of the national dialogue.

However, the Houthi militias, supported by Iran, took advantage of the fragile situation and occupied the capital in september 2014, putting a bloody end to the peaceful political transition in the country. The elected President led the country during the peaceful transition, making concession after concession to protect the country, community-based peace and civil peace from the scourge of armed violence. However, the Houthi rebels have destroyed the country; they have attacked cities and villages, killing unarmed civilians in cold blood and destroying the infrastructure to further Iran's expansionist agenda in the region. In fact, the launch of missiles provided by Iran targeted not only Yemen, but also Saudi Arabia, randomly targeting Yemeni and Saudi Arabians civilians as well as civilian structures.

The main duty of the national army and the Government is to protect the people and infrastructure of our country. For the past three years we have spared no effort to accept all United Nations peace proposals — especially those submitted to Kuwait in August 2016 — in order to seek lasting peace based on three points of reference, namely, the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative and Implementation Mechanism agreement; the conclusions of the national dialogue; and Security Council resolutions on the matter, particularly resolution 2216 (2015).

Those efforts are being made to put an end to the Houthi rebellion and ensure the withdrawal of all weapons and missiles, in order to achieve stability and security for Yemen and the region, as well as to put an end — once and for all — to the Iran-sponsored terrorist networks.

Our capital has been taken hostage. It is within approximately 20 kilometres' range of the national army. We have full capacity within the army to target any spot therein. However, in order to safeguard the lives of citizens who are in the capital, the army has not launched any attack on it.

In contrast, however, the city of Taez is being held hostage under the blockade of the militias who have targeted this most populated Yemeni city, the civilians and infrastruccture on a daily basis. There have been thousands of victims: victims whose fate is the very subject of this open debate, victims of the worst forms of crimes perpetrated by the militias for more than three years. The Houthi militias have committed the worst violations of human rights in Yemen, which have even affected children in indiscriminate shootings. Children have been indoctrinated and recruited as soldiers. Women have also been subject to violations. They are either imprisoned or targeted in peaceful protests organized by the mothers of missing persons.

The Yemeni Government calls upon the international community to undertake all the necessary measures to protect Yemeni civilians, including by providing logistical support to protect and rehabilitate children indoctrinated and recruited by the militias; liberate those who have been arrested and find those who have been subject to enforced disappearance, or have been detained. We highly appreciate the cooperation and support we receive from Member States to protect civilians. We also look forward for that support to overcome the current stalemate. That can be done by encouraging international organizations that protect civilians in conflict through the provision of medical and psychological support to victims.

The Iranian representative spoke of the deplorable humanitarian situation in Yemen, while Iran is in fact the State responsible for that situation. Iran provides the militias with missiles and landmines. Iran is responsible for the murder of Yemen's children. My Government relies on the Council and the international community to strengthen the protection of civilians in times of armed conflict. Pressure must be placed on the Houthi rebels, supported by Iran, to surrender arms and listen to the voice of reason and dialogue to put an end to the fighting that has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths in my country.

It is necessary to put pressure on the militias to prevent them from targeting civilians, especially women and children. We must stop them from using women and children as human shields and preventing their access to schools, hospitals and civilian institutions, using them as barracks and missile launch bases and for other military purposes. That endangers all civilians and constitutes a flagrant violation of all the relevant norms as well as international law and international humanitarian law, which makes it an offence to target civilians in armed conflict.

In conclusion, we declare that the conclusions of the national dialogue and relevant international decisions are a sure solution to protect the lives of civilians and build a united and democratic Yemen. We, the Government, are convinced that the peace so strongly desired by the Yemeni people, one that safeguards their civil and constitutional rights, is envisioned by those conclusions. That will spare us further cycles of conflicts and wars and will also enable us to meet the aspirations of the Yemeni people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Zaayman (South Africa): Let me commence by extending our congratulatory remarks and appreciation to the Polish presidency for the excellent work undertaken by your delegation, Madam President, during the period of your term.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

We wish to begin by commending troop-contributing countries and the sacrifices of their personnel, as well as international organizations such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières, which are at the forefront of monitoring, mobilizing resources and assistance to the civilian populations affected by conflict.

The theme of this debate is particularly important and timely, given the unfortunate events in recent weeks that have further illustrated in graphic detail the dangers that civilians face all around the world in conflict situations.

The Security Council, created following a catastrophic world war that saw millions of civilians being killed, has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. All of us therefore have an obligation to work together to end the scourge of war, which is deeply felt by the civilian population in armed conflict.

It is for that reason that the failure of the Council to act on the situation in Gaza, where a civilian population was deliberately targeted by a military force, is a matter of the utmost concern. It was left to the Human Rights Council to initiate an investigation due to the failure of the Security Council to carry out its mandate. We fully support that independent inquiry.

We stress that the Security Council must uphold and respect the norms of international law, including humanitarian law and human rights law. While it is recognized that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians lies with the host country, United Nations peacekeeping missions are often mandated with that task. Since 1999, the protection of civilians has become one of the central concerns of United Nations peacekeeping operations, yet neither policy nor practice have evolved quickly enough to achieve full and effective protection for civilians. South Africa has argued, in line with resolution 1894 (2009), that, in order for United Nations peacekeeping operations to effectively carry out their protection-of-civilians mandates, they require the resources and capabilities necessary to assume a robust posture to implement their mandate.

South Africa also sees a glaring violation of international law by armed groups in deliberate attacks on medical personnel, hospitals and installations. Such practices not only plunge civilian populations into crisis, but further threaten the mission of the Health Care in Danger project by endangering the lives of health workers, destroying their equipment, obstructing access to civilians in need of medical care and preventing the provision of other basic amenities for life. It must be stressed that creating conditions conducive to delivering humanitarian assistance remains a core responsibility of mandated institutions and of the host country. Any act of aggression towards medical personnel and humanitarian workers is an act of war, and such violations need to be accounted for.

I would like to conclude by commending all personnel involved in peacekeeping missions, as well as civil-society groups, for the service they perform. They are often inadequately resourced for the enormous challenges that they face on a daily basis. South Africa will continue to interact closely with them to allow them to perform their vital international role.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Hoshino (Japan): This month marks the second anniversary of the unanimous adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), on health care in armed conflict, on which Japan was a co-penholder. The resolution was sponsored by more than 80 Member States. I would like to express my gratitude to Poland for holding this ministerial-level open debate and thereby providing an occasion to draw the attention of the international community to this important issue once again.

Resolution 2286 (2016), the first-ever Council resolution addressing attacks on health services, reconfirmed that all parties to armed conflicts have obligations under international law to protect civilians. We welcome the fact that subsequent Council resolutions refer to resolution 2286 (2016).

Since then, however, as fighting born of conflict is increasingly taking place in densely populated areas, the state of the protection of civilians is bleaker. We witness increased use of air strikes in urban areas, resulting in large numbers of civilian casualties. We have also been hearing continuous reports of attacks against health-care providers and facilities. This deplorable reality underscores the urgent need to promote respect for international humanitarian law by all parties to a conflict.

When Japan was a member of the Council, we worked hard on humanitarian issues in Syria as a co-penholder. It is regrettable that fighting continues in many cities in Syria; humanitarian access is often hindered or blocked; medical workers are regularly attacked and even medical evacuation is perilous. While we know the differences in position among Council members and the wider United Nations membership, it is nonetheless the Council's responsibility to emphasize the importance of protecting civilians, thereby delivering a clear message to parties to conflict that they must respect international humanitarian law, even in a war against terrorism.

Japan welcomes the latest report of theSecretary-General (S/2018/462), which provides practical ideas for the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016), including the urgent necessity of enhancing compliance by non-State armed groups. The Council should commit to enforcing the resolution and to seek ways to encourage Member States to take concrete actions to implement it. Japan will be closely watching the development of the implementation process and will continue to engage in the full implementation of resolution 2286 (2016) within the broader context of conflict prevention, namely, by assisting political processes towards conflict resolution and promoting peacebuilding.

Japan has been undertaking efforts to alleviate the suffering of people living in various conditions, including during conflict and in post-conflict situations. By viewing individuals as the foundation of a country and community, we see the importance of investing in people. We would like to emphasize once again the importance of promoting human security through the empowerment and protection of people in all circumstances, including, and especially during armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Ms. Bahous (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the delegation of your country, Madam, for presiding over the Security Council during this month and for Poland's tireless efforts in organizing this open debate and placing this important topic on the agenda of the Security Council. I wish you every success.

I would like also to express my gratitude and appreciation to Secretary-General António Guterres for his informative briefing and for his latest report on this topic (S/2018/462). I would also like to thank the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Chair of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association for their briefings.

I also wish to express my condolences to the bereaved families of the victims of the unjustifiable, illegal and inhumane Israeli violence against innocent civilians who recently protested against the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip.

Two years ago, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, to deter any acts of violence, attacks or threats facing civilians — as well as medical and humanitarian personnel — in armed conflicts. Unfortunately, violence and abuses continue to be perpetrated against civilians and civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and schools, with no deterrence sufficient to put an end to such violations of international law.

Israel used excessive force against unarmed Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, mostly women and children, who were exercising their legitimate right to peacefully protest against oppression and occupation. Israel killed more than 61 Palestnians, including eight children, over the past two months. This is a new crime that is pushing the region towards violence.

Peace cannot be built on the debris of the legitimate aspirations of peoples or on bloodshed or violence or perpetual occupation and siege. Peace can be built only by recognizing the right of all peoples to live in dignity, to independence, to freedom and their inalienable rights. Peace and security will materialize in the region only when the occupation comes to an end and when the independent State of Palestine is established along the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We stress in that regard that Jerusalem is key to peace and harmony in the region.

We call upon the international community to shoulder its ethical and legal responsibilities and take all measures necessary to ensure the protection of the Palestinian people falling victim to the arrogance of the illegitimate Israeli occupation, which disregards all of the relevant Security Council resolutions and insists on its practices, which undermine any opportunity for peace. We reiterate our support of the Human

Rights Council resolution regarding the establishment of an independent mechanism for investigating the incidents in Gaza and the Israeli violations of Palestinian rights. We look forward to the outcomes of that mechanism to secure accountability of those responsible for committing those crimes in violation to international law.

The violence and violations against the Palestinian people perpetrated by the Israeli occupation should come to an end. The international community should shoulder the responsibility to protect the Palestinian people before history. We reaffirm our principled position regarding support for the Palestinian people and their inalienable rights. Within the framework of helping our Palestinian brothers in Gaza, King Abdullah II has instructed the General Command of the Jordanian Armed Forces to enhance the capacities of the Jordanian field hospital in the Gaza Strip and to equip it with all the personnel and equipment necessary to provide the health care required by our Palestinian brothers and sisters due to the violations perpetrated by the Israeli occupation.

Jordan attaches great importance to the enforcement of international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We fully comply with the implementation of all the relevant provisions enshrined in various areas. Our security agencies fully understand these laws; no violation has ever been attributed tothem. That also applies to the Jordanian troops who contribute to United Nations peacekeeping operations in several places. They place the protection of civilians as their top priority.

We reaffirm the importance of applying all measures that aim to improve the protection of civilians, including health-care facilities and workers, as well as humanitarian workers, and to operationalize all procedures for prevention, protection and accountability. A continuous lack of accountability and the scourge of impunity would exacerbate the dangers against civilians and embolden the perpetrators to commit further violations. That will deepen despair, which will eventually lead to violence and extremism. We must gear our efforts towards fighting terrorism and violent extremism and the extreme transborder ideologies that accompany the same.

It is important to execute the Secretary-General's agenda for building and sustaining peace, which places protection at the core of the work of the United Nations in conflict prevention. Once again, we reiterate that the root causes of conflicts should be addressed. Progress must be made also in human rights work and sustainable development, as well as the peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts, especially given the increasing level of armed conflicts and increasing numbers of refugees, as well as military acts and wars that have reached their peak since the Cold War.

Putting an end to armed conflicts is part and parcel of protecting civilians from the scourge of war and conflict. It is also an integral part of the avenues towards development, humanitarian, diplomatic and security actions that we must continue to follow. In that vein, we reiterate that building and sustaining peace and the administration of justice is a common priority for the entire world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development charts a road map to that end. Sustainable development is key in the prevention of conflicts and is a main pillar for efforts towards achieving sustainable peace and the administration of justice, particularly by focusing on people themselves; fighting poverty and marginalization; robust education; socioeconomic development; the creation of hope and prospects for progress, prosperity and dignified life.

Special importance should be attached to the protection of women, girls and children in armed conflict, given the unprecedented crises in today's world. Such crises are attributed to the surge in sexual violence in conflict, which is one of the most horrendous tactics of war and terrorism used to intimidate women and children, threatening security and undermining any chance for peace. The unprecedented wave of crises witnessed by the world has exacerbated all forms of violence against civilians — women, men and children. This is a threat to security and could undermine the potential for peace.

Violence has become pervasive all over the world: Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Syria and Myanmar, to name but a few. Violence against the Rohingya is particularly despicable. This painful phenomenon requires a coordinated and prompt response from the international community, including by meeting the needs of the survivors of violence.

We are all witnesses to the ongoing Syrian crisis and its political and social consequences, which continue to cast shadows on neighbouring countries hosting Syrian refugees. In that context, Jordan has proved its respect for international law by hosting 1.3 million Syrian refugees. This is out of our belief in the necessity to protect civilians in armed conflict.

In conclusion, the responsibility to protect civilians in armed conflict reflects a true commitment by Member States and the parties to conflicts to work earnestly if we are to spare ourselves and future generations the scourge of war and the consequences thereof. This is especially true given the multiple threats facing us today, for example, extremism and terrorism, which threaten the entire globe and which constitute a violation of international humanitarian law, international human rights law and all other humanitarian norms.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Croatia.

Mr. Dogan (Croatia): Allow me at the outset to thank the Polish presidency for convening today's debate on such a pivotal topic. The protection of civilians in armed conflict should remain at the very core of the agenda of the United Nations. In that regard, we welcome the action-oriented report by the Secretary-General (S/2018/462), as well as increased efforts by the Security Council towards making a real difference on the ground.

Croatia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. I will make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

In the First World War, the ratio between military deaths and direct civilian deaths was 10 to one; in the Second World War, the number of civilian deaths surpassed the number of soldiers' lives lost on the battlefield. That remains the case in almost every war that has been fought since. War is becoming increasingly urban in character, making the victims of modern armed conflict much more likely to be civilians than soldiers.

It is truly disheartening that, in some contemporary armed conflicts, due to the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force in populated areas, more than 90 per cent of casualties are civilians. Equally alarming is the fact that we are witnessing an increasing trend in the number of attacks against hospitals and schools. Not only is that a clear and blatant breach of international humanitarian law in times of conflict, but it also leaves lasting consequences on societies, which are unable to provide their children with safe spaces for the fulfilment of their right to education.

We therefore value the opportunity given to us today to deliver a joint message that this cannot be tolerated any longer.

All parties to conflicts, including non-State actors, must fully comply with international legal obligations to protect civilians and to prevent human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law and norms. Those who pay the highest price when all standards of humanity are disrespected or violated are those who are most vulnerable, such as children and women.

Most important, there must be no impunity for perpetrators of atrocities such as war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. No State can be absolved of its primary responsibility to investigate and hold perpetrators accountable, with a higher cause of providing victims of atrocities with a sense of justice. Justice for victims is, beyond doubt, an indispensable precondition in achieving peace and reconciliation.

Furthermore, there is an inextricable link between efforts to protect civilians and ensuring unhindered humanitarian access. We are disturbed by practices of limiting humanitarian access and the delivery of aid as methods of war. We call on all States to ensure that impartial humanitarian organizations face no obstacles in fulfilling their mission, as well the safety and security of those risking their lives to help others.

The dire humanitarian situation of refugees and internally displaced persons in Iraq, Syria and their neighbouring countries is of our utmost concern, as is the situation of the Rohingya in Myanmar and Bangladesh. As a country that has experienced conflict on its own territory, we strongly advocate that all efforts be made to ease their enormous plight.

Croatia is still in the process of establishing the fate of 1,945 Croatian citizens and 150 citizens of other neighbouring countries who remain missing since the Homeland War in the 1990s. We view the issue of missing persons in armed conflict primarily through a humanitarian lens, and wish to convey support to the four-year project of the International Committee of the Red Cross, as also highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General.

We must continue to place prevention at the core of all our efforts to protect civilians and ensure the integration of protection objectives at the core of peacekeeping mission mandates. We must also bear in mind the reform of the peace and security architecture envisaged by the Secretary-General. In that respect, Croatia ascribes great importance to, and is glad to organize courses for, predeployment education and training for both military and civilian personnel in United Nations peacekeeping missions.

It is similarly of paramount importance to focus on further integrating a gender perspective in United Nations peacekeeping efforts, particularly in the context of sexual and gender-based violence, which continues to be widely used as a tactic of war and torture. We therefore strongly support a more gender-balanced composition of peacekeeping operations, which would undoubtedly strengthen their reach and impact on the ground.

In conclusion, we encourage the Security Council to continue keeping the protection of civilians in armed conflict high on its agenda. We must translate our normative and policy progress into concrete action to protect human life and reaffirm the principles of humanity.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the African Union.

Ms. Mohammed: I would first like to express our appreciation to your delegation, Madam President, for convening this open debate on the crucial topic of the protection of civilians. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General and the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as the representative of civil society, for their valuable briefings.

The African Union (AU) is fully committed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and continues to strengthen its normative and legal framework for enhancing that protection. Over the past decade, the AU has responded to many situations in which civilians are caught up in the middle of fighting or directly targeted by negative forces or terrorist groups.In that regard, it should be recalled that the African Union's transition from the Organization of African Unity in 2002 was marked by a paradigm shift from a doctrine of non-interference to one of non-indifference to human suffering. As a result, the AU's peace support operations in Africa have been increasingly tasked with the protection of civilians. Almost all peace support operations authorized by the Peace and Security Council since 2003 have faced protection challenges to a greater or lesser degree throughout the course of their deployment and have utilized various strategies to address those challenges.

In that context, I want to highlight the experience of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which remains one of the best illustrations of the African Union's growing commitment to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Over the decade that has elapsed since its deployment in 2007, AMISOM has achieved undeniable security and political gains in Somalia, while using its active military operations there to ensure that the Somali civilian population has been protected from the terrorist threat.

Our efforts to ensure the highest standards of transparency, professional conduct and discipline and to uphold international law are further reinforced by the fact that the protection of civilians has become a central preoccupation of the African Union Peace and Security Council and the African Union Commission. In recognition of the importance of the protection of civilians in the AU's responses to conflict situations, at its 326th meeting, held on 26 June 2012 in Addis Ababa, the Peace and Security Council decided that the protection of civilians must form part of the mandate of all future AU support operations. Draft guidelines for this were developed in 2010 and an aide-mémoire on the protection of civilians was adopted in 2015. In formulating those policy documents, the AUC has engaged very closely with the United Nations, in particular the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in order to ensure that the protection of civilians in the AU context is aligned with the United Nations approach as much as possible.

The importance that the protection of civilians holds for the AU is further demonstrated by its zero-tolerance stance on sexual exploitation and abuse. In that regard, we have been working very closely with the United Nations to enhance our compliance with international instruments in peace support operations. That is in line with the joint AU-United Nations strategic framework documents, including the 19 April 2017 Joint United Nations-African Union Framework for an Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, and is part of the ongoing efforts to secure predictable and sustainable financing for AU peace support operations.

In conclusion, I want to underscore that the AU's field experience has highlighted the importance of the protection of civilians for the overall success of peace efforts on the ground. The gaps and challenges that today's multidimensional peace operations have to deal with go far beyond the protection debate as such. The protection of civilians is central to the purpose and legitimacy of any peace support operations. Any failure in properly implementing the mandate to protect civilians runs a high risk of turning populations against any international military presence, which is especially detrimental in any asymmetrical threat environment.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Boukadoum (Algeria): I would like to thank Poland for organizing this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, a subject of enormous importance that is a matter of high priority and concern for my country, Algeria. I particularly thank you, Madam President, for your concept note (S/2018/444, annex), and we fully share your views on the priority areas that you indicate. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his most recent report, of 14 May (S/2018/462), and for the shocking picture he has painted of the suffering of civilians in high-profile armed conflicts.

When we look at ongoing conflict situations, we cannot help being taken aback by the numbers of civilian casualties and the challenges that civilian populations are facing around the globe. The recent situation of the people of Gaza, or indeed the Palestinian people as a whole, is a blatant example of that. Needless to say, civilians are now the most likely to be the primary victims, if not the targets, of conflicts, either as direct casualties or enduring the trials of life as refugees who have been displaced and are now suffering the evils of slavery, human trafficking, sexual abuse or food shortages.

Since the publication of the first report of the Secretary-General 19 years ago (S/1999/957), some progress, while it is insufficient, has been made in strengthening the mandate of peacekeeping operations and in carrying out disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes. But that is far from enough. In the most recent report, the Secretary-General describes the situation as one of immeasurable human and societal decimation. Let me be clear: everyone must respect international humanitarian and human rights law, and in situations of conflict, particularly those that are on the Security Council's agenda, protection is an obligation, not an option. There is also still a great deal to be done to improve the protection of society's most vulnerable members — women, children and the elderly. Terror attacks on civilians or the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war cannot and must not tolerated. Attacks on humanitarian personnel or the creation of obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian aid to the civilian population must be rejected and denounced in the strongest terms.

I would like to share with the Council our vision of the way forward and in particular how the Security Council and the United Nations and its Member States could act in that regard. First, while we have international legally binding instruments and generally accepted practices, we still lack a comprehensive, coherent and specific approach to the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Second, we need a broad prevention strategy that clearly should be focused on tackling the root causes of conflicts and must encompass areas such as promoting sustainable development, eradicating poverty and fostering good governance and a culture of peace, tolerance and the rule of law.

Third, the protection of civilians must be based on the principles of universality and non-selectivity, particularly where conflicts arising from foreign occupation are concerned. The implementation of international humanitarian law — and specifically the Fourth Geneva Convention — is not an option. It is an obligation that the international community, through the Security Council, must impose when an occupying or administrative Power does not respect it.

Fourth, we must address the issue of accountability with regard to impunity for violations of international humanitarian law.

Fifth, ensuring more effective coordination among the United Nations mandated bodies — the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council — remains vital. The Peacebuilding Commission also provides an appropriate framework for such coordination in post-conflict situations.

Sixth, we urge the Security Council and the Secretariat to strengthen their cooperation, common approach and interaction with regional organizations such as the African Union, which has made tremendous progress in that regard and, I should point out, has transitioned from a policy of non-interference to one of non-indifference.

Seventh, the Security Council could consider the systematic inclusion in all peacekeeping mandates of an obligation to report violations of human or humanitarian rights.

Lastly, this meeting must be seen as a reaffirmation of our collective commitment to protecting civilians in situations of conflict. We hope that at the conclusion of this open debate the presidency will issue a summary of the proposed recommendations, with clear steps to be taken that we can build on in our proclaimed and shared endeavour.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Ms. Blais (Canada): Let me begin by expressing my delegation's sincere appreciation to the Republic of Poland for convening today's important and timely ministerial open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Canada recognizes the urgent need for sustained high-level attention to this issue.

At a time when violence and conflict threaten international security, Canada is joining efforts to build a more peaceful and secure world while putting the protection of civilians at the forefront of our actions, and we are grateful for the opportunity to explain how. We do this first by consistently advocating for compliance with international humanitarian law with a view to strengthening the protection of civilians. Just last month, under Canada's Group of Seven (G-7) presidency, G-7 Ministers for Foreign Affairs committed to using their support to State and non-State parties to encourage effective implementation of international humanitarian law. That will be achieved through practical measures such as seeking commitments from partners to enhance respect for international humanitarian law, helping them incorporate it into their doctrines, field training and rules of engagement, and also assisting partners in ensuring that their judicial structures are capable of effectively addressing their own international humanitarian law violations, should they occur. We urge the members of the Council and all States Members of the United Nations to undertake a similar commitment.

Canada is outraged that attacks on civilians, health-care facilities and medical and humanitarian personnel persist. We call on the Council to clearly condemn direct and indiscriminate attacks on civilians and demand that parties to armed conflicts comply with their international humanitarian law obligations and with Council resolutions.

Secondly, Canada is acting to ensure accountability. In Myanmar, Canada is committed to working closely with other countries, international organizations and civil society to establish lasting peace and reconciliation, and a clear pathway towards accountability for atrocities committed in Rakhine state. Specifically, we are coordinating with international partners to support existing evidence-gathering efforts and the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar. Canada will also explore options for assisting in investigating and documenting gross human rights violations and abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence, especially in Rakhine state. Additionally, in both Syria and Iraq, Canada is funding evidence collection, analysis and documentation efforts to support the future prosecution of members of Da'esh and other parties for war crimes or other violations of international law. Let me be clear. In order to achieve sustainable peace in conflict zones, including Syria, the transition out of conflict must be accompanied by an inclusive process of accountability that addresses serious violations of international law by all parties to the conflict.

Thirdly, Canada is working to strengthen the protection of civilians through peacekeeping. United Nations peacekeeping has helped to provide protection to millions of vulnerable people affected by conflict. On the ground, we have peacekeepers in the United Nations missions in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo who are working tirelessly with international partners to protect civilians. We will soon be deploying personnel to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, another operation where the protection of civilians is mandated as its top priority.

However, as the nature of conflicts changes, so too must modern peace operations. Canada is therefore also promoting innovative approaches to enhancing the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations. For example, last November, we launched the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. They have so far been endorsed by 62 Member States and are a set of political commitments that take an assertive stance on preventing unlawful child recruitment in the context of peacekeeping operations. Canada also launched the Elsie Initiative on Women in Peace Operations, a pilot project through which we will develop and test innovative approaches to increase the representation and participation of women in United Nations peace operations. We firmly believe that this will lead to more effective missions.

(*spoke in French*)

Lastly, Canada is working to address the needs of women and girls affected by conflict. The protection of civilians must take account of gender issues in order to be effective. That is why Canada's second national action plan on women, peace and security includes measures to protect women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict, as well as to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse by international personnel. We must also remember the special challenges faced by persons with disabilities in conflict situations, including their access to humanitarian assistance. We encourage Member States that have not yet done so to join the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action.

When Canada last served on the Security Council, in 1999 and 2000, we fought to put the protection of civilians on the Security Council's agenda. Today those considerations constitute a significant goal for peacekeeping mandates. That is major progress, but it is clear that our work is far from over. Today, let us recommit together to shouldering our responsibility to prevent conflicts, protect civilians, and hold perpetrators of serious international crimes to account. The Council should rest assured that Canada will do its part.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of New Zealand.

Mr. Cheshire (New Zealand): I join those who have thanked the briefers for their contributions and the delegation of Poland for organizing today's important debate.

As we have heard, there has rarely been a more dangerous time than right now to be a civilian in a conflict zone. Two years ago, New Zealand was pleased to work with four other non-permanent Council members to secure the unanimous adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) in response to the horrific escalation in attacks on medical facilities and personnel in Syria, Yemen and beyond. It was an important reaffirmation of our collective commitment to upholding international law in the face of such atrocities. Yet health-care personnel and infrastructure continue to be targeted in conflict zones around the world. Despite the best efforts of organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières, large numbers of civilians are unable to access health care. Medical supplies are blocked, hospitals bombed and doctors killed. Besieging civilians and denying them critical health care cruelly exacerbates the suffering of innocents. Such a lack of respect for international humanitarian law is totally unacceptable, but we must not become despondent or dispirited. There are three areas in which we need greater shared determination to reverse those trends.

First, we need to see the Council more determined to discharge its responsibility to maintain international peace and security. It must make use of all of the tools available to prevent conflict, defend fundamental international norms and hold those who violate them accountable. It should also consider practical measures such as publicly calling out offending parties and instituting humanitarian safe zones in areas where civilians are at risk during heightened hostilities. The ongoing attacks on health-care workers and facilities demonstrate the urgent need for the Security Council to explore additional ways to use its authority to end attacks and ensure that those responsible face justice.

Secondly, we need to see all Member States determined to demand universal compliance with international law from both State and non-State actors. That is a prerequisite for the protection of civilians and health-care workers in conflict zones. We cannot let the erosion of international rules become the new normal. Respect for accountability must stand. While we supported the General Assembly's establishment of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for crimes committed in Syria, we regret that it was necessitated by the Council's failure to take action. It is incumbent on all of us to ensure that those rules are strictly adhered to and that violations of international law are met with appropriate consequences, including from the Council, given its unique responsibilities.

Thirdly, we need continued determination from Member States in support of the Secretary-General's ambitious changes to how the United Nations works in the areas of management, development and peace and security. Taken together, those reforms promise a world where we can significantly reduce the risk of conflict. More directly, the changes to the peace and security pillar should result in a Secretariat better positioned to use and collect information to provide early warnings concerning threats, such as those to civilians and health-care facilities, and then to act on them. It should also lead to a more integrated approach to peacebuilding and sustaining peace across the United Nations architecture, thereby enabling the United Nations to more effectively protect civilian interests.

New Zealand is determined to do its part, and we hope that that determination will be shared by others.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bulgaria.

Mr. Panayotov (Bulgaria): Bulgaria thanks you, Madam President, for convening this important debate and commends Poland's strong commitment to the topic. Today's briefers' valuable presentations demonstrate that almost 20 years after the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), on the protection of civilians, this agenda item continues to be highly relevant to the Security Council's work.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier on behalf of the European Union and its member States, and I would like to make the following additional remarks in my national capacity.

We all agree that the best way to protect civilians is to prevent conflicts from erupting or recurring in the first place. In that regard, the concept note (S/2018/444, annex) for today's debate offers a valuable opportunity for considering the broader scope, including its preventive and humanitarian aspects, of the concept of the protection of civilians. The human costs of armed conflicts can be seen in all too many places. In order to address the numerous humanitarian challenges around the world, we must ensure the basics, which include respecting and implementing international humanitarian law. Sieges, starvation and unacceptable restrictions on humanitarian access are clearly unlawful. When compliance fails, accountability must be ensured. If the States involved do not want, or are not able, to bring those responsible to justice, we have a very important tool at our disposal — the International Criminal Court, which can ensure that such crimes do not go unpunished.

Another basic aspect of the protection of civilians is prevention. In that regard, Bulgaria shares the view that implementing the concept of sustaining peace is a cost-effective way of finding viable political solutions to armed conflicts by addressing their root causes, reducing fragility in post-conflict situations and combining humanitarian and development efforts. My country is following up on its humanitarian development commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit and continues to give financial support to United Nations-related activities in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. We also believe that strengthening the mediation capacity of the United Nations is key, and Bulgaria has therefore made another voluntary financial pledge to the United Nations Mediation Trust Fund this year.

In the wake of the recent reviews of the peace and security architecture, United Nations peacekeeping has evolved, giving priority to the broader scope of tasks related to the protection of civilians, particularly the protection of women and children in conflicts. In that regard, Bulgaria, as a police-contributing country to United Nations peacekeeping operations, has endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. However, the challenges are many, and we therefore recognize that there should be better coordination and greater efficiency and effectiveness with a view to strengthening the role of the United Nations. To that end, Bulgaria supports the Secretary-General's reform proposals for restructuring the United Nations peace and security pillar and welcomes his Action for Peacekeeping initiative (see S/PV.8218) and strong commitment to the zero-tolerance policy on sexual abuse and exploitation.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Maldives.

Ms. Zahir (Maldives): I thank Poland for convening this important open debate. As many speakers have already noted, it has been two years this month since the Security Council adopted its landmark resolution 2286 (2016), which calls for the protection of civilians, especially where the provision of medical care in conflict situations is concerned.

The protection of civilians should be the first objective in managing any conflict. The reality, however, is that the character of conflicts has undergone radical changes in recent years. Non-State actors fighting on their own or on behalf of other States are replacing States as the key participants in conflicts. In such situations, respect for and even recognition of international humanitarian law have been ignored. That situation requires finding ways to stop attacks on civilians and hold perpetrators accountable. Most important, we have to start thinking of ways in which such attacks could be prevented. That is where civil-society organizations can play an important role in creating awareness among potential and actual warring parties of the need to protect civilians and the delivery of humanitarian aid in particular.

Open debates of this nature are extremely important for drawing attention to the seriousness of situations, such as those involving attacks on civilians in conflicts in various parts of the world, and to offer suggestions for remedies. But the importance of ensuring that the Security Council takes immediate action, as required under the Charter, in protecting unarmed civilians, is quite another matter. It is unacceptable that the Council failed to act when unarmed civilians were attacked and killed in Palestine last week. Every member of the Council, and indeed every State Member of the United Nations, has the solemn responsibility to respect and implement the resolutions both of the Council and the General Assembly. If any Member decides to ignore them, it will harm the legitimacy and credibility of the United Nations, particularly the Security Council.

The Maldives is competing for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the 2019-2020 term at the elections to be held on 8 June. If we are elected, the Maldives will work with Council members, troop-contributing countries and civil-society organizations to create greater awareness about respect for international humanitarian law. The primacy of upholding international humanitarian law should be a crucial element in the preparation of peacekeepers and indeed in designing peacekeeping missions, for they have a significant role to play both in protecting civilians and providing humanitarian aid.

The Maldives has continued to reiterate its call for constructing an analytical framework that can enable the Council to consider essential changes to the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping missions. The framework would start by establishing greater coordination and operational coherence between peacekeeping operations and the United Nations country teams on the ground at the level of a mission's inception. Peacekeepers can fully execute their mandate only if they are given the necessary resources. The Maldives stands ready to be a partner in helping to save civilians trapped or threatened by conflict. We will help to craft shared solutions for a shared destiny.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Kadiri (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): It is a pleasure to see you presiding over the work of the Security Council this month, Madam President, and we would like to thank you for organizing this ministerial-level open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing, taking stock of the current situation and highlighting the challenges facing the international community with regard to the protection of civilians. I would also like to thank Mr. Yves Daccord, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Edwar for their informative briefings. The regularity with which the Security Council addresses this important topic is unfortunately quite justified given the turbulence in the international arena, which compels us all to work to promote and respect the principles of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Morocco reiterates its condemnation of all acts of aggression or intimidation against civilians. I would also like to make the following comments.

First, we reiterate that the protection of civilians is primarily the responsibility of States. However, we are compelled to conclude that in times of conflict, some States' ability to execute that task is inadequate or non-existent. In those cases, the international community has the responsibility to support them by strengthening their capacities and providing them with the means to live up to their obligations.

While the protection of civilians is often at the heart of the mandates of multidimensional peacekeeping operations, it is one of the most difficult aspects to implement, given the scale of the task. The fact is that peacekeeping operations are often deployed in unstable areas, making it difficult to carry out their mandates. The protection of civilians therefore requires adequate financial and human resources in terms of Blue Helmets' numbers, equipment and training. The expectations of the various parties involved — the local populations, the host country authorities and the Security Council — also have to be managed. And the protection of civilians is not just about mere physical protection. All of the components of a mission that is mandated to protect civilians have a part to play, which is why it is important to clearly delineate each of their responsibilities.

Secondly, humanitarian assistance within the framework of the protection of civilians should be clearly separate from political aims and shielded from any kind of exploitation by any of the parties to a conflict, in order to improve the protection of humanitarian personnel and ensure efficient transportation of humanitarian aid. Missions should deploy appropriate protection measures to prevent civilians from becoming targets. It is the States' task to fulfil their obligation to combat impunity and prosecute all those responsible for the commission of genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity.

Thirdly, the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel in conflict situations means respecting the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005, as well as all relevant international instruments on the protection of the wounded and sick, and of humanitarian and medical personnel, when engaged in exclusively medical-related work. In that regard, we would like to emphasize the importance of the recommendations in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/462), issued in accordance with resolution 2286 (2016). This kind of protection requires a comprehensive, multifaceted approach on the judicial, humanitarian and security fronts and a clear allocation of mandate responsibilities for humanitarian and medical personnel, when engaged in exclusively medical activity and operating in complex situations, in close coordination with one another.

Lastly, we believe that it is important to focus on a preventive approach to protecting civilians. That can be developed by strengthening the capacities of the countries concerned, promoting the rule of law, ensuring good governance, entrenching a culture of human rights and establishing early-warning mechanisms to identify potential conflicts and ensure that they do not turn into overt conflicts.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Morocco shares the Secretary-General's firm belief that the protection of civilians requires the implementation of the provisions of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all those who work to protect civilians in conflict situations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Mrs. Nguyen (Viet Nam): At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to the Polish presidency for convening today's important open debate. My thanks also go to the Secretary-General, the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the representative of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association for their informative briefings.

Viet Nam aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

In recent years, conflicts have increased sharply in number and have severely affected many regions of the world, causing immense suffering and resulting in abuse and deaths of civilians. The tragic estimates are that close to 90 per cent of current casualties are civilians, the majority of them women and children. We are very concerned about the fact that, as the Secretary-General says in his report (S/2018/462), civilians in armed conflict are living in clearly deteriorating conditions. They are targeted by the excessive and indiscriminate use of force, their access to humanitarian relief is hampered and they are deprived of basic necessities that they need to survive. We therefore reiterate our strong condemnation of all acts of violence or abuse committed against civilians, as well as the use of lethal weapons to strike civilian facilities, including schools, hospitals and residential and public areas. Such acts constitute clear violations of international law and are a grave threat to international peace and security.

We share the view that it is the primary responsibility of States to protect their own citizens and prevent violence against civilians within their jurisdiction. We call on all parties to conflicts to strictly comply with their obligations to protect civilians, in line with international human rights law and humanitarian law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, notably resolutions 1894 (2009) and 2286 (2016), while fully respecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of States.

The United Nations should further enhance its leading role, in close coordination with regional organizations and other relevant actors, to help strengthen a culture of compliance with international law and promote good examples and best practices in addressing armed conflict and protecting civilians, facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance to civilians in need, and assisting countries in their efforts to resolve conflicts by peaceful means, improve their national capacity to address the root causes of conflict and advance sustainable development. In that regard, we welcome and encourage further efforts on the part of Member States and United Nations bodies to implement resolution 2286 (2016). It is also of paramount importance that the Security Council fulfil its responsibility by collectively responding to the current serious threats against civilians in armed conflicts and implementing urgent and concrete measures to protect civilian infrastructure and facilities essential to the survival and health of the civilian population.

Viet Nam is concerned about the escalating violence that has taken place in the Gaza Strip in the past few days, resulting in many deaths and injuries among Palestinians. We strongly oppose the use of force against civilians and urge the parties concerned to exercise restraint, stop escalating tensions, settle conflicts peacefully and strive for a comprehensive, equitable and sustainable solution in order to save the lives of Palestinians and ensure that the legitimate interests of the parties concerned and regional peace and stability are taken into account.

In conclusion, the prevention of conflict and peaceful resolution of disputes are the best ways to protect civilians. It is now high time to translate words into deeds in order to end the suffering of innocent people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Myanmar.

Mr. Suan (Myanmar): My delegation would like to congratulate the Polish presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, a very timely and pertinent subject considering the current circumstances of growing security challenges around the world. I would also like to thank Secretary-General Guterres for his statement and Mr. Yves Daccord, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Hanaa Edwar for their briefings.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

In 2016, the Security Council adopted resolution 2286 (2016). It constituted a milestone in setting a course of action for the protection of civilians in armed conflict. It calls on States and non-State parties to conflict to respect international law, facilitate safe access for medical and humanitarian personnel engaged in medical duties, prevent and address acts of violence and attacks on medical and humanitarian personnel and integrate practical measures to protect the wounded and the sick.

While we recognize that States have the primary responsibility to protect their citizens, the fact is that countries in armed conflict often lack the capacity and institutions they need to implement their obligations. The primary responsibility for taking action against the perpetrators of atrocities must rest with the State concerned. For that, it is essential that States strengthen their law-enforcement institutions, establish the rule of law and promote a safer environment for their citizens. The international community should support the capacity-building efforts of such countries. At the same time, we must also address violations by non-State parties, which often operate outside the effective control of the Government and deliberately harm civilians in order to achieve their objectives. The protection of civilians in conflicts and the provision of humanitarian assistance should be guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, neutrality, objectivity and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. The politicization of humanitarian issues must be avoided.

Conflicts are the cause of civilian insecurity and instability, which endanger the social fabric of peaceful coexistence. For that reason, we should focus on conflict prevention and resolution, and on building sustainable peace. In that regard, the peaceful settlement of disputes, negotiation, mediation and dialogue should be applied as vital tools to prevent and resolve conflicts. We must remind ourselves of the important nexus between achieving peace, realizing sustainable development and eliminating poverty. Conflicts and instability can have lasting effects on a country's development. Without peace, there can be no sustainable development or social justice. There can be no lasting peace without the rule of law, respect for human rights and inclusive and sustainable development that leaves no one behind.

The greatest national endeavour of Myanmar today is forging a lasting peace and bringing to an end the seven decades of armed conflict that have brought untold suffering to our people since the country's independence. Without peace, stability and the rule of law, we will never be able to realize our ultimate goal of building a genuine democratic federal union that can guarantee security, freedom and progress for its people.

To that end, we have initiated a nationwide ceasefire agreement with various ethnic armed groups. Of some 20 armed groups, 10 have now signed the agreement, and we continue to work hard to bring the others on board.

We have embarked on implementing a political process to tackle the root causes of the conflicts and achieve sustainable peace. The 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference was launched in 2016 as a political platform that brings together all stakeholders in a political dialogue for peace and to lay the foundation for our democratic federal union. Two successful sessions of the Conference have been held, and the second of them, in May 2017, reached an agreement on a 37-point agreement known as the Union Peace Accord Part One, which will constitute part of the basis for a future democratic federal constitution. Preparations are now under way for a third Panglong Conference.

Building and sustaining peace is not an easy task. It requires political will, courage and determination and cannot be achieved overnight. It is also essential to advocate for a culture of peace and national reconciliation. But peace is the only way to safeguard humankind from violence, conflict and human suffering.

I would like to conclude by reassuring the Council that Myanmar will continue its efforts to enhance the safety of vulnerable people caught up in conflicts. We would also like to express our sincere appreciation to all our friends around the world and to the United Nations for supporting our peace process. We will work unceasingly to fully realize lasting peace and put an end to civilian suffering due to conflict and strife.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Portugal.

Mrs. Pucarinho (Portugal): I would like to thank Poland for convening today's debate on a very crucial topic during its presidency this month. I also thank the Secretary-General and the briefers for their comprehensive insights and valuable perspectives, and for the recommendations that they have shared with us.

Portugal aligns itself with the statements delivered earlier on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians. I would like to make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

Portugal welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Council resolutions on the protection of civilians (S/2018/462) and fully supports the recommendations outlined, whose implementation will definitely require additional collective efforts. Once again, the report emphasizes that prevention is the most effective way to protect civilians.

Despite the fact that the Council put the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict at the heart of its agenda almost two decades ago and has adopted a number of resolutions on this crucial topic, every year we are confronted with alarming rises in the number of civilian deaths and the destruction and suffering caused by parties in armed conflict. Civilians continue to account for the vast majority of casualties in armed conflict. They continue to be exposed to violence and are the primary victims of violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law.

The humanitarian environment faces challenges that are contributing to shrinking the space for humanitarian action and jeopardizing protection-of-civilian obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law. Regrettably, in some instances humanitarian access has been deliberately blocked, often for political reasons or alleged security-related concerns. Although international law requires that schools and hospitals be treated as sanctuaries, such facilities continue to be systematically used for military purposes or are deliberately targeted, thereby overexposing civilians, especially children, young people and the elderly, to violence.

We cannot stress enough the need to protect and promote the human right to health in conflict, and we will continue to draw the Council's attention to this critical issue. I would also like to add in that regard a specific note on the importance of ensuring adequate health care for those who are more vulnerable or in need of special protection, such as women, children and persons with disabilities, including those related to mental health.

Health-care providers are crucial humanitarian agents in conflict situations and deserve special protection in performing their noble task. Any violence aimed at them, or at medical facilities and vehicles, is a humanitarian issue with a widespread and long-term multiplier effect. I want to remind the Council that the duty to prevent and address acts of violence, attacks on and threats to medical care in armed conflict must be honoured, and we must act collectively to ensure that those in need have access to medical care. We should mention civil-society organizations in that regard, as they play a vital role in providing medical and other kinds of essential care to people affected by conflicts all over the world. It is therefore often crucial to collaborate closely with them in order to enhance assistance to those in need.

Any failure to halt violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses, which may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes, also highlights the importance of prioritizing prevention and the fight against impunity. That can be achieved only by ensuring accountability and systematic and impartial investigations of reported violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including attacks on medical convoys and personnel, civil society and journalists. Whenever national authorities fail to take the necessary measures to ensure the protection of civilians and respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, the Security Council can play a more active role, as appropriate. In this regard, the International Criminal Court remains key to fighting impunity for the most serious violations of international humanitarian law, in complement to the roles of national tribunals and some international tribunals, as well.

Although there has been undeniable progress in integrating a protection-of-civilians component into the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping missions and making it a priority in the allocation of capacity and resources, United Nations peacekeeping missions still struggle to fulfil their mandates and protect their own personnel and innocent civilians on the ground. That trend must be reversed, and for that United Nations peacekeeping missions must be given clear mandates, act in full respect for human rights and international humanitarian law in accordance with the highest standards of conduct, discipline and accountability, and be provided with adequate capabilities, including a human-rights-protection component. They should also reflect a gender perspective. All of these, including a more equitable gender representation, have been shown to contribute to enhancing the performance of peacekeeping operations. That also applies to mandatory, standardized and United Nations-certified training of military and police, notably on the protection of civilians and children. In this regard, Portugal reiterates its pledge to continue conducting training programmes for its national personnel and the members of its armed and security forces who are currently assigned to seven international peacekeeping missions.

In conclusion, we believe that only a coherent and long-term approach, based on addressing the root causes of conflict, using political diplomacy for prevention and conflict resolution and bringing humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts together, can effectively strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law. That should promote accountability for perpetrators, improve humanitarian access to those in need and strengthen international efforts and the operational response to current realities, including that of massive global displacement. In that regard, I would like to mention the global compacts on migration and refugees currently being negotiated, as it will be crucial to ensure that those future regulatory frameworks reflect an approach based on international solidarity and respect for human rights and international humanitarian law in order to respond to the global issues of migration and refugees. All of this should make an effective contribution to protecting civilians and building sustainable peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica.

Ms. García Gutiérrez (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to thank you, Madam President, for convening today's important debate. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General and the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross for their briefings.

Costa Rica aligns itself with the statements made by the Permanent Representatives of Qatar and Panama on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect and the Human Security Network, respectively.

A year ago, we met in this Chamber to discuss the progress made in the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016) (see S/PV.7951). A year later, we have an even more devastating situation, where millions of people are victims of the cruellest consequences of conflict, forced to abandon their homes and deprived of the most basic necessities. The urbanization of conflicts exponentially increases the direct impact on civilians, which further worsens the landscape we face.

The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/462) confirms that the challenges in this area are becoming increasingly complex and profound, with the most vulnerable populations, including women and children, being the most affected. We agree with the Secretary-General that the priority in such cases should always be to prevent conflict and avoid its recurrence or escalation, and we support his efforts in this regard. However, the assistance and guarantee of human rights protection and basic security guarantees to civilians in conflict are responsibilities of all parties. We also reiterate that the protection of medical and humanitarian personnel, as well as medical facilities and hospitals, must be a priority.

It is also imperative that all parties to armed conflict, including non-State armed groups, make commitments and take concrete measures to fulfil their obligations to protect civilian populations, as well as medical and humanitarian personnel and medical facilities and hospitals. These obligations derive directly from international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and from various Security Council resolutions. In that regard, we would like to highlight France's declaration on the subject, adopted on 31 October last year. I would like to take this opportunity to say that my country is pleased to confirm its commitment to that initiative.

Restrictions on the provision of and access to medical and humanitarian assistance in situations of conflict not only contradict basic ethical principles of humanity, they also constitute a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. Similarly, deliberate attacks on medical personnel, medical facilities and places of refuge for the sick and injured are considered war crimes under international law. Parties to conflict must cease such attacks once and for all, withdraw from urban centres and refrain from using explosive weapons in cities and other densely populated areas. Such attacks not only result in a large number of victims among civilians but also cause large-scale destruction of homes, essential infrastructure and basic services, which further aggravates the humanitarian situation of people in conflict.

The use of explosive weapons in urban areas is simply unacceptable and constitutes a huge humanitarian challenge in current conflicts. We also condemn the use of improvised explosive devices, in line with the Secretary-General's report and the recommendations of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and we are deeply concerned about the reports of the ongoing use of cluster munitions and chemical weapons. In that regard, we believe that the situation will continue to deteriorate until there is greater control of the international arms trade. Legislation on arms exports must comply with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and regulations on their illicit use should be introduced in order to prevent their unregulated circulation from continuing to fuel conflicts. We therefore join the call made by the Secretary-General to States that have not yet done so to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty as a further measure for addressing that issue and its terrible consequences for civilian populations.

Costa Rica reaffirms its support for Secretary-General's recommendations in his report. We reiterate the importance of the Secretary-General continuing to make use of the tools provided for in the Charter of the United Nations by remaining vigilant, reporting regularly to the Security Council and making direct recommendations in order to protect, but above all to prevent, attacks and violations of human rights against the civilian population.

Particular attention should be paid to developing national regulatory frameworks that establish institutional responsibilities for the protection of civilians, as well as to strengthening institutions and the rule of law, in the context of respect for human rights and the norms of international law. It is equally vital to put an end to widespread impunity in such cases. My country supports initiatives such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. We advocate strengthening the Mechanism by including it in the Organization's regular budget.

The Security Council must fulfil its obligation to protect and see that justice is done for victims. It is therefore urgent that it begin taking action by referring crimes of mass atrocities to the International Criminal Court in order to ensure accountability and end impunity in cases where the national authorities do not meet their obligations. In that regard, we once again call on Council members to implement the code of conduct promoted by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, and we urge the permanent members in particular to refrain from using the veto, appealing above all to their sense of humanity and respect for life.

Mr. Margaryan (Armenia): We thank the Polish presidency for organizing today's open debate and providing the concept note (S/2018/444, annex). We also thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict

(S/2018/462) and its recommendations. We are [illegible] grateful to Mr. Yves Daccord, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the civil-society representative Ms. Hanaa Edwar for their insightful briefings.

Today's debate is an opportunity for us to recommit to international humanitarian law, and in particular to full compliance with the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, without reservation, as a crucial framework for the protection of civilians in all conflicts.

The report of the Secretary-General depicts the bleak situation of civilians living in conflict-affected areas through shocking statistics, with tens of thousands of fatalities in 2017 alone and many more injured. We note the many alarming developments and threats faced by civilians in the conflict areas mentioned in the report. We share the view of the Secretary-General that the gravity and scale of the current situation must be matched by robust international protection mechanisms. In too many parts of the world today, we are seeing a rise in the ideology of hatred and racial discrimination in situations where human beings' right to life is increasingly threatened. Systematic and gross violations of human rights, the use of force, economic coercion and a lack of international protection are some of the main factors fuelling the increase in such threats. We strongly condemn violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including attacks on humanitarian and medical personnel, as well as violence, threats and intimidation aimed at journalists and media workers. The perceptions of the inevitability of civilian losses and civilian suffering in armed conflicts are equally disturbing.

The principles of the humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence of humanitarian action must be fully respected. Unimpeded humanitarian access must be ensured in order to prevent the suffering of civilians caught in conflict. Armenia's commitment to promoting the importance of the safety of children and students in armed conflict is also reflected in its endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration. Promoting the norms of international humanitarian law and raising awareness in that regard is an important element in Armenia's security-sector governance. International humanitarian law is incorporated into the curricula of military educational institutions in Armenia. We also greatly appreciate the ICRC's cooperation in implementing training projects and reaching out to people affected by conflicts who are in need of humanitarian assistance.

The civilian population of Nagorno Karabakh and the regions of Armenia bordering it have been consistently exposed to serious humanitarian risks. Azerbaijan's military aggression against Nagorno Karabakh in April 2016 not only violated the ceasefire agreement signed in 1994 and the 1995 trilateral agreement consolidating the ceasefire, it also resulted in grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, including barbaric acts equivalent to war crimes and crimes against humanity. It inflicted losses on the civilian population, including women, children and the elderly. Moreover, in clear violation of humanitarian law, the Azerbaijan authorities have placed military installations in civilian settlements and used them as a launch pad for shelling along the line of contact with Nagorno Karabakh.

By pursuing a policy criminalizing those who visit Nagorno Karabakh, including journalists and parliamentarians from all over the world, the Government of Azerbaijan has shown that it is prepared to conduct unprecedented mass atrocities in the region. It is a well-known fact that the perpetrators of crimes try to limit the flow of information and freedom of movement in order to better conceal their ongoing and planned misdeeds. It is also alarming that the leadership of Azerbaijan continues to incite hatred against Armenians, a fact that has been affirmed and condemned by many human rights organizations and bodies, including the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its concluding observations on the 2016 reports of Azerbaijan (CERD/C/AZE/CO/7-9).

Protecting the civilian population requires full and unhindered access for the ICRC, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and United Nations treaty bodies to conflict areas, including to places of detention, as well as ensuring the monitoring of conditions of captives in conflict situations. The Nagorno Karabakh authorities have cooperated fully with the ICRC mission in Stepanakert, which has regular access and the ability to verify the humanitarian situation on the ground. The principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence in humanitarian action must be fully respected. Attempts to politicize a purely humanitarian issue and refusals to cooperate with regard to missing persons at the level of the relevant authorities demonstrate a clear intention to deliberately impede progress in that area.

An international presence in conflict areas and monitoring and verification mechanisms are crucial to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh fully support establishing an investigative mechanism on the ceasefire violations and expanding the monitoring capacities of the Office of the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The implementation of those clear-cut agreements would enable the international community to investigate and verify all cases of ceasefire violations and human casualties, as well as to identify the party responsible.

Placing human life above malicious political manipulations requires genuine will, free from hatred and intolerance, which are regrettably currently lacking in certain places. We firmly believe that, in order to effectively protect civilians, priority should be given to early action on warning signs of deteriorating situations that could potentially result in conflicts or a resumption of hostilities. It is imperative to recognize and combat the extremist and fundamentalist ideologies emanating from certain countries and terrorist or other criminal groups that encourage hatred and discriminatory attitudes towards their neighbours, minorities or simply those with different identities.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Salarzai (Afghanistan): Let me first thank the Mission of Poland for having convened this ministerial open debate on the urgent issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I would also like to extend my delegation's gratitude to His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland and to other speakers for their statements today.

Today's meeting is of crucial importance for Afghanistan, a country that has seen decades of imposed conflict, including terrorism and violent extremism, leading to a disproportionate number of civilian deaths and injuries. Recently, we have seen a significant increase in the number of barbaric attacks on our civilians, where our schools, mosques, hospitals and, as of late, electoral registration sites and other safe spaces that are of a purely civilian nature have come under attack. By systematically targeting our children, medical personnel, journalists, commuters and ordinary men and women, the Taliban and other terrorist groups who have come from outside our borders have sought to compensate for losses on the battlefield with attacks on soft targets and by sowing fear and discord in our society.

Based on our recent estimates, last year alone 2,903 civilian deaths and more than 6,000 civilian injuries occurred as a result of enemy attacks nationwide, mainly against civilian targets.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) 2017 report on protection of civilians in armed conflict clearly depicts how the Taliban and other terrorist groups have used suicide attacks, including targeted and deliberate killings, bombs and other explosive devices, abductions and other arbitrary and extrajudicial punishments against our civilian population. As we assemble here to discuss the crucial issue of protecting civilians in conflict, only a few hours ago another terrorist attack in Kandahar reportedly killed 16 civilians and injured more than 30 others. The utter disregard for human life demonstrated in these attacks constitutes a clear violation of international law.

Against that backdrop, landmark resolution 2286 (2016) reaffirms the Council's determination to bring the behaviour of parties to conflict and Member States alike in line with international humanitarian law. It also highlights the obligation of the parties to a conflict to protect and care for the wounded and sick, and to respect and protect those providing impartial medical care and to facilitate their mission. In the same light, prevention and mitigation of harm to the civilian population remains a key priority for the Government of Afghanistan.

Our brave defence and security forces, which are at the forefront of fighting international terrorism, have valiantly defended our territorial integrity and the safety and security of the civilian population. We have also developed and improved a number of strategic, operational and tactical measures to protect civilians during conflict.

In October 2017, we endorsed the national policy on civilian casualty prevention and mitigation and its implementation plan. This plan consists of specific guidelines for our security forces to prevent and mitigate civilian casualties and damage to property. Further, the plan strictly prohibits any use of civilian facilities such as schools, hospitals or clinics for military purposes.

Additionally, our Government agencies have continued to promptly and thoroughly investigate any possible violations of the provisions of the policy by any Government official or agency and take the appropriate corrective measures, as recommended in the UNAMA 2017 annual report.

We have also ratified the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, including all amendments and protocols, in August 2017, which will result in improved protection of civilians. Additionally, the Tawhid Center in the National Security Council has been established to maintain a database aimed at tracking conflict-related civilian casualties, among other responsibilities.

We are strongly committed to ensuring that our security forces operate within national and international law and regulations to protect civilians during military operations. Our Ministry of Defence has established an internal board for investigating allegations of human rights abuses, including civilian casualties and the recruitment of children into the armed forces.

In 2010, we established an inter-ministerial steering committee on children and armed conflict. The following year, the committee developed a national action plan to end and prevent the recruitment of children in our defence and security forces.

Among other reforms, we established 21 child-protection units with the Afghan national and local police recruitment centres, which have prevented more than 100 underage voluntary enlistments. Moreover, NATO training sessions for senior Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) personnel in the area of civilian casualty tracking and mitigation is offered at the strategic, operational and tactical levels.

Furthermore, the Civilian Casualties Avoidance and Mitigation Board, intended to identify areas critical to minimizing civilian casualties, meets every three months and has developed the practical efforts undertaken by domestic and international military forces to mitigate casualties.

These measures are a clear reflection of our firm commitment to the protection of the civilian population. Our protection measures have had an impact on reducing the number of casualties attributed to pro-Government forces during combat operations against terrorists. We are pleased that this fact was also acknowledged in the UNAMA report. Moving forward, we will remain fully committed to continuing to streamline, improve and increase our measures aimed at lowering the number of incidents resulting in civilian harm due to ANDSF operations as much as possible.

Needless to say, the absolute majority of civilian casualties are the result of the barbaric attacks conducted by the Taliban and other terrorist groups, who have no regard for human life and dignity. Regardless of what we do, so long as their deliberate tactics of attacking civilian spaces and targeted killings do not cease, our civilians will continue to suffer. The continuing attacks on hospitals, medical professionals and humanitarian workers, among other civilians, as well as the recent despicable attack in Kabul, where an ambulance packed with explosives was used, show their complete disregard for international law, the Geneva Convention and resolution 2286 (2016). In fact, these attacks constitute and meet the definition of war crimes against the civilian population, and stringent action must be taken against the perpetrators, financers and planners of such ghastly action.

Terror, violence and insecurity in our country are rooted in factors that lie outside Afghanistan and have regional and global dimensions. Hence the goal should be to address this issue and overcome the structural drivers of conflict and violence. The Council has a fundamental role to play in that regard as the United Nations body entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security. We expect the Council to respond appropriately to ensure the protection and well-being of Afghan civilians, who are being senselessly killed and maimed on a daily basis.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Elnour (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I will begin by congratulating you personally, Mr. Minister, as well as the delegation of your brotherly country, the Republic of Poland, for holding this meeting on such an important topic during Poland's presidency of the Security Council this month. We wish also to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Guterres; the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross; and Ms. Hanaa Edwar, Secretary-General of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association, for their very pertinent briefings. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/462) and its recommendations.

My delegation endorses the statement delivered earlier by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. I would also like to make some points in my national capacity.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the Secretary-General in his condemnation of attacks against civilians in armed conflicts all over the world. We reaffirm that the protection of civilians is, first and foremost, the responsibility of the countries affected by conflict before it is a mandate and a duty entrusted to peacekeeping missions. That is why in discharging their mandates, peacekeeping operations and international non-governmental organizations active in that area must respect the sovereignty of the host country, its laws and its traditions while respecting the principles of impartiality, integrity and international law in order to safeguard mutual confidence on an ongoing basis.

After taking action alongside the international community to settle the conflict in western Sudan, we came away with some lessons. That conflict came to a positive end when we saw the establishment of peace, and I would like to share the lessons we learned from the experience. First, we want to emphasize the importance of cooperating with all parties in the human rights domain — that is to say, international, regional and civil-society organizations as well as United Nations entities. Secondly, we must make collective and unilateral announcements to ensure that ceasefires are not interrupted. Thirdly, we must teach our armed forces the principles of international human law and the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Fourthly, the various public bodies, the United Nations and the international community at large should exchange information so as to have regular institutional communication. Fifthly, I stress the importance of establishing a shared political and legal framework such as the 2011 Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. We must abide by such agreements and invite those who oppose them to join us.

There is a panacea for dealing with violations against civilians — a peaceful settlement through inclusive, unfettered negotiations. That is what we used, as the Government of the Sudan, and have done for years. Furthermore, as part of our regional effort to protect civilians and promote peace in South Sudan, we have renewed an agreement to provide humanitarian access to those affected by war in South Sudan, using four road and river crossing points with the cooperation of the World Food Programme and the Government of South Sudan. Last year, we provided cereals from our own strategic stockpiles to the World Food Programme and also allowed the Programme to purchase humanitarian aid items locally in order to alleviate the impact of the famine in South Sudan. I would also like to recall that the memorandum of understanding extending the agreement on the delivery of international humanitarian assistance to South Sudan through the Sudan was signed in July 2014. We renewed that agreement and we have done so each year to strengthen our efforts to protect civilians affected by the conflict in South Sudan. We are also hosting more than 1 million refugees from South Sudan across our territory, providing them with various services, such as health care, education and housing. Many of the refugees we host are from Yemen, Syria and other African countries.

In conclusion, protecting civilians, promoting humanitarian action, consolidating peace, making peace and reconciliation sustainable and fostering sustainable development are at the forefront of our priorities in the Sudan, with the cooperation of the United Nations and the international community. We hope to deliver on those priorities through that cooperation.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Musayev (Azerbaijan): At the outset, I would like to thank the Government of Poland for convening this important open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Azerbaijan fully supports the Secretary-General's determination to genuinely contribute to preventing wars and sustaining peace, as well as his efforts to conduct the reform process with a view to responding early and effectively to conflicts and crises.

The increasing brutality and changing nature of conflicts, as well as the vulnerability of civilians in wartime, require redoubled protection efforts worldwide. Those efforts must be free of selectivity and must address all situations of armed conflict without distinction, including those of a protracted nature and with prolonged impact on civilians in particular.

Azerbaijan supports the increased focus on the problem of internal displacement as a result of armed conflict. A lack of agreement on political issues does not and cannot provide any justification for interfering with the rights of displaced persons and for discriminatory policies and practices aimed at preventing their return and changing demographics along ethnic and religious lines.

A pressing issue that requires urgent action is that of civilians, including women and children, who have been taken hostage or reported missing as a result of armed conflict. Azerbaijan is continuing its efforts to raise awareness of the problem at the international level, including through the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women, of which my country is a main sponsor.

The importance of ensuring accountability for violations is fundamental to enhancing respect for international law. Where national action is inadequate, the international community and the Security Council should play a more proactive role in taking concerted action. It is critical to ensure that peace and mediation efforts do not encourage, accept or tolerate under any pretext situations that have been achieved by the unlawful use of force or other egregious violations of general international law, such as war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The issue we are discussing today is crucial for the Security Council, the entire international community and my country in particular. It concerns the serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in the course of Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan and its resulting military occupation of my country's territories, including, among other things, deliberate attacks on civilian objects, killings of civilians, the taking and holding of hostages, mistreatment and summary executions of prisoners of war and hostages, sexual violence, extensive destruction of inhabited areas and public and private property, and pillaging and forced displacement. The scorched-earth policy implemented by the Armenian armed forces involved the ethnic cleansing of all Azerbaijanis in the seized territories, as a result of which my country has one of the largest displaced populations in the world. As of 1 April, 3,875 citizens of Azerbaijan were registered as missing in connection with the war. They include 710 civilians, including 67 children, 265 women and 326 elderly people. Armenia refuses to cooperate in establishing these missing persons' fate, in clear violation of international humanitarian law.

The impunity still enjoyed by the perpetrators of these crimes, who include some holding political and military posts at the highest level in Armenia, not only prevents progress from being made in achieving peace and reconciliation, it also aggravates the situation on the ground. Direct and deliberate attacks by Armenian armed forces on civilian targets in Azerbaijan situated along or behind the front lines have continued with varying frequency and intensity. Moreover, Armenia is taking purposeful measures to consolidate the results of the use of force and prevent displaced Azerbaijanis from returning to their homes and properties. Azerbaijan will spare no effort to end the unlawful occupation of the Nagorno Karabakh region of Azerbaijan and other occupied territories, achieve a political settlement of the conflict based on international law, and ensure peace and justice in the region.

In conclusion, we believe it is essential to ensure that the Security Council consistently maintains its focus on the protection of civilians and systematically reiterates its demand that all parties to armed conflicts comply fully with their obligations under international law.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Liberia.

Mr. Brown (Liberia): Since I have the special privilege of being the last speaker today, I would like, if I may, to thank everyone here for their patience and time throughout what has been a truly long day. My delegation would also like to thank the Polish presidency for convening today's open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, welcome the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/462) and thank the other speakers and contributors for their insights.

Reflecting on what we have gleaned from those important contributions, we are compelled to confront an uncomfortable truth. Even as we debate, the protection of civilians in armed conflict around the world is anything but ensured, with increasing acts of violence and brutality being perpetrated against civilians and causing unimaginable human suffering, deprivation and carnage. The Secretary-General is right. This is unconscionable. So too is our continued inability to act.

When here in the Security Council we fail to equitably and fairly apply the applicable, agreed-on tools of international humanitarian law, not because they do not adequately address the problem of protecting civilians in armed conflict, but because we have vested interests in one side or the other; when we are unable to set our sights high enough to see how such conflicts lower the standards of our humanity; when we cannot move beyond our narrow self-interests to agree to help those who need our help the most, the victims and unwilling participants in these conflicts, not only do we fail the innocent women and children, doctors, nurses and other health-care and humanitarian workers, we also fail the United Nations and all that it should truly represent. We fail the common values of our humanity. And yes, we fail ourselves.

Of course, we have adopted numerous resolutions calling for the protection of civilians and humanitarian and health personnel, as well as for compliance with the obligation to distinguish between civilian populations and combatants. Yet the atrocities that shock our collective consciences have continued. Are the resolutions so ineffective? Or might it be that we who are adopting them are not really committed to their implementation? Where a State's institutions have clearly collapsed under the weight of the destruction attendant on armed conflict, is it still reasonable to lay the burden of the protection of civilians on such a State and those crumbled institutions? Should we perhaps also extend the duty to protect civilians in an armed conflict to the region of the conflict, as well as to other external supporters who have a vested interest in the continuation of the conflict? Is it really too difficult for us to commit to a code of conduct governing how we wield the enormous powers of the Security Council to better protect civilians in armed conflicts?

Liberia could not agree more with the Secretary-General that the most effective way to protect civilians is to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of armed conflicts. That is why we support the new paradigm of preventing conflict and sustaining peace. However, we must also commit to working creatively, selflessly and aggressively to end ongoing conflicts. We can do this. We must do it, for the wailing mothers and dying children for whom there may be no tomorrow, and for the humanitarian and health-care workers who, despite the rising risks to their own lives, continue to offer hope in desolation, surrounded by a rising tide of hopelessness. We know that for all of these people — whose faces we may never see and voices we may never hear and yet to whom we are all inextricably connected by the common thread of our humanity — we could stop the endless debates and laudable speeches and, instead, collectively recommit to acting as we know we should.

Of course, we cannot be all things to all people. But this, too, is who we are — humankind's best chance to afford all a right to life, to care for their families, and to live in peace, security and human decency. In its purest and most exalted form, that is why our United Nations exists. We know that we are a confluence of competing interests and power, but even as we compete we must never forget that the essence of the United Nations is that we will be united for peace, security and human development.

The meeting rose at 7.50 p.m.